THE

LESSON OF A DILEMMA

AND OTHER SERMONS

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I.

THE LESSON OF A DILEMMA.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."
JOHN vi. 68, 69.

ON the edge of some cliff after a landslip, or in some mountain gully just ploughed by the storm-torrent, you have seen suddenly laid bare the roots of bush or willow or towering tree. The soil has been undermined, or has crumbled away, and a vertical section of the lower portion of the tree has been brought into view. You wondered at the slenderness of the hold the tree possessed upon the earth, and at the insignificance of the appliances by which it drew its bountiful life out of the soil and maintained itself against the storm.

Christ's discourse on the bread has been followed by a great falling away amongst the disciples. The torrent of pent-up envy, disaffection, unbelief, has broken loose and carried havoc, upheaval, ruin in its course. Wholesale desertions have taken place, and the elect twelve have been more or less shaken. It is not unlikely some of them may have secretly weighed over the question of leaving Christ. The root of their faith is laid bare in this passing storm, and if we may see its proportions in the opening sentence of

Peter's reply to Christ's question, that root does not seem to be a growth altogether deep and noble and healthy. His confession of faith closes in a more elevated strain than that in which it begins, but at the outset Peter intimates that he and his companions hold on to Christ just then because no better course seems open to them. There was no alternative that they as sane men could very well choose. "To whom shall we go?" They could not improve their position by change. The man of Nazareth was not all they could desire, but He was the best candidate for their suffrages available at the moment. That view of Christ as the only refuge possible to them in their helplessness and distraction, a last resort into which they were driven by the weakness and unspirituality of other teachers, a forlorn hope of their oft-baffled spirits, was not a very exalted ideal. And yet it involved an important discovery, and was at the same time a stepping-stone to higher faith and to worthier qualities of service.

Do not let us be too hard on the disciples, for there may be times when we ourselves cannot take much higher ground. Our Rabbi and Saviour and King may not realise in every particular the ideal reason and imagination and caprice have combined to construct, and yet He seems to be far and away the best Master of those asking for our faith and service. Every alternative claim made upon us is so inferior in the dignity of its sanction, and so evasive in the credentials it offers, that it is the highest thing we know to cleave to Christ. Our loyalty does not rest so much upon what we perceive Christ to be in Himself as on the discovery we have made of the relative inferiority and imperfection of His rivals,

We are disaffected towards the world, and those whom the world in its wisdom exalts, rather than swept by a great passion of faith and love into discipleship to Christ. "To whom shall we go?"

To the credit of Peter this at least must be said, he had been brought to *such a sense of his own limitations, that he could not think of forsaking Christ without joining himself to another.* For a man conspicuously self-sufficient both by temperament and life-long habit, that meant a great deal. It is the besetting temptation of a robust man to think he can find within himself all the salvation he needs. He not only assumes that Christ's offer of help is an impertinence, but that he is under no necessity of becoming indebted to any of the world's great saints and teachers. Help, sympathy, leadership in the pursuit of the supreme good, had become indispensable to this man who was once proud, masterful, self-reliant. He must get out of himself or he will die. He is secretly beseeching some sovereign wisdom to teach him in his folly, and some spotless love to heal his disease of soul. Many of Christ's hearers, perhaps not more egotistic than Peter at the beginning, were feeling that they had no need to go out of themselves. Of those who went back and walked no more with Christ, the vast majority never thought of first finding prophets and counsellors to take the place of Christ. They went back to the past, and to their own miserable selves. Blind themselves, they lead others into the fatal ditch.

It is said that in Norway every three or four years swarms of lemmings find their way to the coast and swim out to sea, where they perish in great numbers. A false trust in instinct, or experience of too narrow

a range, seems to be the clue to this phenomenon of collective suicide. Instinct was all right within narrow lines. It had guided them in the past across the little lakes and fiords whose further shores they could not see. Without fatigue or mishap they swam these comparatively narrow strips of water, but at last perish when they reach a realm too vast and tempestuous for their circumscribed instincts to deal with. They are the victims of overweening confidence in the sphere of the unknown.

And there are people who have trusted their own skill and resource in the petty problems of daily life who think they will be quite safe when they come to deal with the infinite. They have no need to go outside themselves for help and counsel and saving guardianship, and they perish, and that miserably.

Peter had a better spirit than that. The crowds of vain and superficial disciples may drift away under the offence of this discourse without knowing whither they are going. But if Peter cannot see the shore he will at least have adequate help and counsel. In spite of its rash self-confidence, his heart has in it such a sense of inevitable dependence upon another in the things that are beyond human ken, that he must seek out some great one to whom he can plight his allegiance if he leave Christ. He cannot be unattached. Whoever else may drift off without waiting for the glimmering of a new leadership, he at least must have a wiser, holier, and loftier nature on which to lean. He could not join the scattered sheep who have no shepherd. He had come to have too much insight into the vastness of life's issues to face whirlpools and blackness of tempest alone. There was a most excellent humanness, nay, more, a God-

taught spirit, in the man, and however much this Rabbi might affront his prejudice and preconception, he could not tear himself away until he had discovered one whose lips were richer in grace, and upon whose head there gathered a diviner halo. His words assume that the disciples could not find in themselves all they had come to need.

Peter's answer implies further, that *no satisfactory substitute for the man of Nazareth could be found in the prophets or reformers of the day.* It is possible they might have found a leader who would have flattered their weaknesses and taught along the special line of their preconceptions, and if such an one had inspired half the confidence of Jesus Christ they would have been glad to take him. Men never like to go outside their own immediate circle for help and salvation. If any normal member of the human race had shown himself capable of dealing with the question of sin and bringing life and immortality to light, the world would never have tolerated for a moment the idea of a Saviour from the outside. If the disciples could have found one after their own heart to kindle the same hope and bring the same deliverance from fear, they would have left Christ. There was so much within Him that was foreign to them.

Jacob's sons would never have gone down to Egypt if they could have got food from a neighbouring tribe. They would have been laughed at if they had gone to Egypt professing they had been drawn by disinterested attachment to the reigning dynasty or admiration for the art and science and civilisation of the Nile. They had nowhere else to go, and the alternative staring them in the face was death. The position of the disciples was not unlike that.

The first form into which this blunt disciple threw his confession of faith certainly paid no excess of honour to the Master. It did not start on any very high plane. Peter and his comrades could not well help themselves. After looking deliberately round they declared by their spokesman that there was no other rabbi to whom, with their new views and aspirations, they could turn. The typical rabbi was sordid, pitiless, stony, and lacked every sign that should attend the teaching unction. If the Baptist had been alive, Simon and Andrew, and James and John could scarcely have returned to his circle, and the Baptist himself would have felt like a usurper if he had taken them back. They had outgrown him, and he had lost his old power over them. The Gentile philosophies had no message to their conscience even if they were within reach of competent interpreters of those philosophies. They could do nothing else but hold on to Christ. Their faith, as described in this opening sentence of Peter's confession, did not start on transcendental levels. Before Peter closed his lips the pronouncement became positive, robust, dogmatic, but the plain prose of it was, their faith at the first took its rise in sheer helplessness, distraction, ignorance of holier or more conscience-contenting teaching than that which came forth from their own Master's lips. "To whom shall we go?"

Nowhere else to turn! Not a very inspiring confession, it is true, but let it be remembered that some of the victories and achievements which have clothed our world with its richest renown have been due in no small degree to dilemmas and limitations in the field of choice. To be steadfast to what seems best

under the constraint of an unwelcome alternative is indefinitely better than doing nothing at all. We might have been found giving ourselves up to a bitter, stony despair. It is something not to have succumbed to that temptation.)

The commander-in-chief of an army marches and countermarches his troops in every direction, now massing them for some supposed assault, now breaking them up to meet at new points some supposed movement of the enemy; and, in spite of all this expenditure and restless enterprise, he effects nothing. What is the clue to his failure? He has too many possible courses to choose from. Another general conducts his forces to a decisive victory within as many hours as the other has occupied months. How is the difference of result to be explained? Not by the genius or training or numbers of the one as compared with the other. All the disadvantages may be on the side of the second general, and his success due to the fact that every course but one is closed. That compels a concentration which issues in a world-renowned victory. There has been nothing for it but to put his men with their backs to the mountain or the sea, and to fight for life and home and fatherland.

Two men aspire to be inventors of first-rate rank. The one spends all his life in study and experiment, and lights upon nothing new; but the other has some surprising discovery to put before the public every year or two. How do we explain the difference? Is it luck and nothing more? The unsuccessful inventor, with perhaps equal ingenuity, is following impracticable and unremunerative paths for a lifetime. The successful inventor knows in what direc-

tions others have toiled without profit, and scarcely ever spends a week on a misleading scent. His shrewd despair of finding anything new or remunerative in certain directions shuts him up to one golden path of fruitful research.

The pioneer and the explorer owe not a little to the priceless tradition and literature of failure. If a new trade route or a railway is projected through strange lands, the schemes must be narrowed down by keeping in view ill-fated schemes of the past and the causes that have wrecked them. If the North Pole is ever reached, half the glory will be due to those who have failed, but who have shown by their failures and sufferings and pitiable deaths what routes are hopeless.

The man who is so versatile that he seems made to succeed in a dozen things may be so embarrassed by his opportunities that he will fail in all; whilst the man who knows that he must fail in eleven directions, but has fair hope of succeeding in the twelfth, will often make for himself a position the other will envy. It is something to know our limitations of temperament and circumstance.

And is it not thus in religion? Our far-ranging caprices must be mortified, and we must have our lessons in disappointment and despair. We must know what masters are helpless to guide us, and learn to recognise the paths that are finally closed. God deals with men in merciful wisdom by reducing the number of alternatives that confront the soul. In the teachings of history, in the knowledge made accessible to us of the world's effort to find God and formulate a code of fellowship with Him, in the sense of emptiness growing up out of the experience we

have had of ourselves, God is closing not a few avenues that would inevitably lead to spiritual frustration and despair. The man who rushes out of a burning building, and finds himself in a corridor from which various doors pass back into basement and gallery, may feel thankful if all these are locked, and the one wide door leading out into the street is ajar. The man who is riding a fast-failing horse in the desert, and who days ago drank his last mouthful of water, may be thankful if every track has been hedged up or blocked, save that which leads to the solitary pool of the district; otherwise he may ride by a course from which there will be no return, and end his career in fever, madness, untended death. The narrowness of the choice offered in the gospel is the essence of all wisdom and mercy—"I have set before thee an open door." Thank God that in dealing with the problem of sin and the soul and the life to come, no wide range of alternatives is put before us. "To whom shall we go?" may seem poor praise of Jesus Christ, but it may indicate the fact that we are shut up in a dilemma that is divinely opportune, and may be the beginning of a faith of amazing intensity and concentration. Agnosticism, if it have not become a rigid, ice-cold, petrified temper of soul, may be the threshold across which we shall pass to enlightened trust and ample knowledge. If our pessimism have not corroded into a malignant despair that does not greatly care to hope, it may be the first turning away of the soul from other gods and lords and rabbis—a turning towards the light of Him who is "the hope of Israel and the salvation thereof in the time of trouble." It is well the closed door should meet us,

and that, for the moment at least, if we are looking elsewhere for help than to the Prophet of Nazareth, despair should sting our souls.

Moods of soul will ever and anon arise within us, in which faith in Christ, if not absolutely satisfying, will seem *the best thing we know, and as such it must surely be binding upon us*. Problems persistently thrust themselves into view which He does not seem to have solved. But has any one else solved so many? Certain parts of our nature may recoil from His hard sayings. But has any one else satisfied so much within us that claims kinship with the skies? It often seems as though He had set Himself to shock our fallible reason and chafe our surface tastes and sensibilities, as He shocked the crowds in the synagogue at Capernaum by telling them they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. But have not others, by evading the question of sin or treating it with gaiety and light-heartedness, affronted our consciences, whilst He seems to have been riding rough-shod for the moment over tastes largely conventional, and a reason that is prone to error? We are bound to Him by all that binds us to what is best in ourselves. It would be ethical suicide to leave Him till we have found a teacher of more ideal perfection, and whilst all suicide is base and mean and unmanly, that is the most shameful of all. The instinct of ethical self-preservation has died out in the man who apostatises before finding a worthier guide to receive his allegiance and faith. To our restless, feverish, distempered spirits Christ may seem like a slender rill in the drought rather than the living river of God bursting from the temple and spreading itself like the wings of a mighty

angel to bless and restore a dying world. But we must keep to the silver thread creeping out of the hot volcanic hills rather than perpetrate the fatal infatuation of turning again to the burnt-up table-land of Samaria and to the cracked clay in the sealed and silent fountains of Jezreel. Who is to succeed Christ? "To whom shall we go?" That seemingly ignoble exclamation may sometimes be the voice of all that is best and holiest in our nature.

Christ can only be *fully known and loved when we study Him in contrast to His rivals*, and such a study may be a providential stepping-stone to the most exalted ranges of faith. Men of a somewhat narrow piety think that the study of comparative religion can be of no practical value to plain, simple-minded Christians. They deprecate parallels and contrasts sometimes drawn in the pulpit between Jesus and Confucius, Buddha, Zoroaster, Socrates, Mahomet, and others. The questions are outside the range of earnest, common-sense Christianity. The editor of the "Translations of the Sacred Books of the East" is looked upon as a man who is hunting up heroes from the ends of the earth and setting them up to compete with the immortal hero of Nazareth. So much the better, say I, for the hero of Nazareth and for us who have been brought to trust in His name. Max Müller's staff, together with missionaries in foreign lands, introduce us to other rabbis, and for the moment we find the interviews with which we are privileged both interesting and instructive, but we come away feeling how impossible it is for us to forsake the Rabbi at whose feet we have always sat, or grow less passionate in our gratitude to Him for

His grace and saving revelations. Peter's reply perhaps implied a smattering of comparative religion as well as a shrewd estimate of the power and promise in contemporary schools of Jewish thought. We do not know where he had picked up his bit of comparative religion, possibly from foreign sailors who touched at the Mediterranean ports sometimes visible on the highlands of Galilee, or from caravans of foreign merchants who passed through his native town in their journey between Egypt and Damascus; or possibly from the Jews who came from every part of the known world to the great feasts at Jerusalem. It was not much he knew, but enough to make him content to stay by Christ's side. Unless Peter had known something of the limitations of contemporary rabbis, Jewish and Gentile alike, he might not have been so decisive in his allegiance to the carpenter Rabbi of Nazareth.

A candid study of the world's noblest faiths, and of the histories of their founders, whilst convincing us that God teaches His will to every race and to every age according to its capacity, will yet send us back to Jesus Christ with a wholesome despair of finding away from His presence light and help for the deepest problems of the soul. The mere idea of transferring our thoughts from the Great Master to those who compete with Him for the sovereignty of the world's faith will terrify us. A wider field of investigation is open to us than to the disciples, and better-sifted materials are within our reach; yet our alternatives are just as narrow as theirs. Where shall we turn? The Positivist Calendar tells us to turn everywhere and see that we get the utmost out of the world by having a separate master for our

honour and meditation on each of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. Shall we take the issues of our spiritual life and destiny and submit them to the sage whom all members of the Chinese race honour and its scholars and officials worship? I do not underestimate the purity or the usefulness of his practical ethics, but I should as soon expect to have the deepest problems of my conscience answered in Lord Chesterfield's "Letters to his Son" or the *Vade Mecum* of the railway bookstall, "How to be a Gentleman," as at the feet of Confucius. He was the prophet of virtuous statecraft and small family etiquette, and shunned the supreme questions of God and sin and the future. Can the secret of eternal life be here? Shall I go to the Hindoo mystic immortalised in "The Light of Asia"? With a face in which gentleness and despair are strangely mixed, Gautama Buddha tells me that the highest aim possible in the universe is to cease to be. Sin must be destroyed by the destruction of consciousness. It is as though some sanitary reformer were to arise and say we must deal with cholera, not by quarantine and disinfectant, but by conflagrations. He is the benign prophet of a bloodless nihilism. His lips speak of the death of all sense and emotion and intelligence, and he bids me woo that death by litany and fast. Shall I put myself under the treatment of the theosophists, and drink in that diluted Buddhism prepared for the palate of the Western world by Mesdames Blavatsky and Besant? Well, I rejoice in those principles of kindness and brotherhood to which the adherents of theosophy are expected to subscribe; but even if all that could prevent the error of the future, it

cannot repair the past, and I happen to want cure as well as prevention, and I do not find it in the new psychology. The gifted woman who is a splendid friend to the match-girls is a sorry minister to the suffering conscience. Shall I go to the scientist with my soul-moving problems? He tells me I must laugh away the question of sin as I laugh away the dream following a heavy supper—only beware of suppers in the future. The questions about which I trouble are of very limited significance, and not at all the vast issues my imagination has made them. He is kind enough to take my conscience to pieces as the parent takes to pieces the automatic toy that has frightened the child, and proves that there is nothing supernatural in it. These mighty fears and debatings are bits of defunct experience inherited from benighted ancestors. The voice that seems to be the voice of God reminding me of my sin is some morbid mood that fixed itself in the tissues of a human brain centuries ago, and reappears in every generation. All I can say in reply is that this ancestor must have been of gigantic personality, for the voice is stronger than I am; and if its reproaches are to be silenced, it must be at the bidding of one who is both greater than myself and greater also than the ancestor who speaks within me. It is profitable for us to know what the teachers of our own and other ages have to say. Thus only are we brought to despair of all other help but that which is laid up in Jesus Christ, and it is the aim of God's education of us to bring us to that.

This exclamation is not so meagre as it seems, for *God's help is needed just as much to make us distrust those who cannot help us as to make us trust the one*

who can. It is a characteristic tendency of the day to widen the old definition of inspiration. The pedantic or the travelled man of the world takes pains to shock us by speaking of other Bibles besides that out of which we have been taught from our childhood, and speaking of them with just as much or even more respect. Well, I am content to accept the term, if I may be allowed to interpret it and to define the province of the books to which this enlarged conception of inspiration is to be applied. The Bibles which record the acts and precepts of sages who are made to compete with Christ for my faith are inspired? Be it so. I will accept them as a message from God teaching me how helpless those Eastern sages are to bear me up where I most need help, and to animate where I most need hope. How few are the questions on which I can give them my unlimited confidence in comparison with the questions on which I can implicitly trust Christ! "To whom shall we go?" is the unconscious exclamation with which we rise from all such studies, and it perhaps needs a more plenary inspiration to teach our proud, contumacious souls to say that, than to say after the first lesson has been learned, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." We never go outside human nature to find salvation if there is the faintest prospect of finding it within. To go outside common human life for help and redemption seems to imply that sin is such a prodigious thing. We do not like to recognise that it involves terrible conditions and must be dealt with by one who is Divine. As much supernatural light may be required to detach us from human nature and its grandiose promise as to attach us to Him in whom is our help and salvation. Our very dilemmas are

Divine, our despondences are an inspiration, and the clouds that for the moment rest upon us are not such as gather over a forsaken and godless world.

A traveller in Nicaragua tells us, that one of the birds of that country builds in a thorn-bush, close by a wasps' nest. The thorns form a thick stockade to keep out intruders, and the wasps act as unconscious pickets and sentries, and hold back invading foes. One day this naturalist observed returning to its well-defended nest a bird which was unfortunate enough to entangle itself in the thorns. Its wild flutter and cry of distress stirred up the wasps that had hitherto acted as its body-guard, and swarming forth in their angry hosts they stung the little songster to death. It was the blunder of the poor bird that turned sentinels into assassins.

The dilemmas and distractions and scepticisms that hang about your pathway and press upon your spirits on every side are not necessarily evil. These things that seem so harsh and cruel and fruitful of pain may be so used as to safeguard your access to the Lord, your Refuge and Habitation, and make inviolable the shelter you have found in Him. It is not by His purpose that you stumble and enmesh yourself in perplexity and pierce your soul through with sorrow and bring about your own destruction. The way to Christ does sometimes bristle with pessimisms through which you need to pass. Stinging despairs lurk at His very threshold. Let these guard you against the destroyers who would take you away from Christ. When you find no light in man for your problems, and no help for your racked spirit in church or world, do not fret and harass yourself. God's hand has implanted despair of what is human,

and He will make that very despair lead up to steadfast and untroubled faith in what is Divine.

In turning his gaze from all others, and fixing it upon Christ alone, Peter's *faith grows strong and peaceful and many-sided.* The heart of the man could not rest in uncertainties. He could not consent to be stranded. From his earliest days he had been trained to hope for redemption, and his nature, moreover, was too active and healthy for despair. Distraction and despondency unfit for common duty, and the Being who made us has not condemned us to the disability of agnosticism, if He has at the same time infixed the sense of duty within us. The man is under Divine guidance, and providence itself has limited the scope of his inquiry so that he may come the more swiftly to the true centre of salvation. The quest of immortality is instinctive with every nature made in God's image, and this elementary solicitation bound him to the teacher, whose words at least, whatever meaning might be attached to his prediction of sacrifice, were a pledge of the wonderful gift. Christ's intimation of the way in which this gift was to be bestowed shocked Peter's preconceptions just as much as it had shocked the deserters, yet, in spite of that, the words answered a deep-set need in the heart of Peter no word of scribe could touch. The words to which they had listened on this and earlier occasions appealed to an instinct one and the same with that of self-preservation. He gave eternal life by His word, and pre-eminently by the word in which He foreshadowed His approaching death, and devoted Himself to its mysterious pains. By the word of love in which He gave Himself, the word which in such lips of faithfulness and truth had

all the efficacy of the actual sacrifice, He took away the sentence of condemnation from human spirits, brought men to the knowledge and full vision of God, and made them at once participate in the life of Him who alone possessed immortality as an inherent attribute.

And then Peter passes on to proclaim his faith in the Divine holiness of Jesus. "We know and have believed that Thou art the Holy One of God." Christ's power to impart eternal life rests ultimately upon His unique sanctity of character. This confession perhaps does not touch the question of Christ's essential relation to the Father so deeply as that at Cæsarea Philippi, and at this earlier stage Peter might have incurred the condemnation of an orthodox Trinitarian. But the first was perhaps the preparation for the second confession. Step by step the apostle was being led. This mysterious being had come from the depths of Godhead to be a new beginning of goodness and sanctity and immortal life in the human soul.

Where do we stand in the light of the questions Christ addressed from time to time to His followers? Are we inclined to leave Him? Who do we say that He is? Can we do without Christ? Have we drifted? Let us come back if only to confess in His presence for a moment, before we continue our quest, that we have found no one as yet to take His place. Long ago we learned the first lesson that salvation is not in ourselves. We surely do not need to spend further time and thought in trying to find a substitute and successor for Christ. The range of choice is very narrow. God has mercifully reduced the alternatives. There is not much left to perplex us. Confess that

Christ is unique, and sooner or later that will involve the rest. Make the confession in Capernaum, and by and by you shall astonish yourself and your fellow-disciples by breaking out into that higher confession of Cæsarea Philippi, the subject matter of which is not revealed by flesh and blood, but by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II.

CURIOSITY AND OBLIGATION.

"Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"—JOHN xxi. 21–23.

IT is interesting to observe the different, and in some cases apparently opposite, ways in which Christ deals with disciples of different tempers, histories, vocations. In this morning scene on the lake shore, He brings into view, by a prophetic word, the tragic martyrdom awaiting Peter, the chief of the apostles, but not a single word will He breathe to suggest John's future career, be it of service or of pain. And this is not caprice. There are well-weighed reasons, some of them quite obvious, for the varying and apparently contradictory method of dealing with the two men.

The forecast of Peter's future is vouchsafed unasked, and for very important ends. The gift of prophecy must never be used to satisfy an idle curiosity, and the question about John had an element of that sort in it. At first sight it may not seem to be quite true to nature to represent Peter as the subject of this temper in a moment of such tragic interest, when his own pathetic future had just come flashing into view; but men and women, in extreme

pain, often show a keen interest in the affairs of their friends. We have all met with sufferers of estimable character who have welcomed every little bit of romance from the countryside that could be taken to their bedsides. Perhaps the romance may have helped them to forget for the time their own terrible lot. By busying himself with the events in the unopened chapters of John's life, Peter may have been seeking relief from the strain to which his feelings must have been put at receiving this hint about the last dark scene of his own life. His curiosity was kindly and well meant, but curiosity implies a defect somewhere or other in the quality of our faith, and we always tempt the Lord when we indulge a spirit of restless inquisitiveness.

It would, moreover, have brought the restored Peter into a new temptation to have answered the question he put. It must have tended to revive the old rivalry between himself and the favoured son of Zebedee. Indeed, by reminding us at this point of those special marks of favour shown to himself in the past, John seems to intimate that underneath Peter's request to know something of the future of his rival there was the disposition to institute a new comparison. Had the high place of Peter been permanently forfeited by his unfaithfulness? Was Peter's destined pain judicial and an ineffaceable mark of his humiliation, or was it a stepping-stone to after distinction in the kingdom of heaven? How will these two men match in their future careers? Would John reach a higher distinction by a less thorny pathway? What was John's course to be, and would that give any clue to the throne he would come to fill? Such perilous questions as these might have been stirred

by an answer to Peter's request, if, indeed, they did not already suggest the words, "Lord, what shall this man do?"

The terrible lot to which Peter was appointed may have been made known by the Master for the purpose of saving Peter from undue discouragement as he thought of his own barren boast of heroism and allegiance. It may have been a part of his forgiveness that he should be declared worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, and an evangel of spiritual power to assure him that, under new conditions, he should realise his uttermost ideal of sacrifice. John had professed no confidence in his own martyr devotion, and did not need any such message as was addressed to his fellow-disciple. It seemed fitting to the Master that the newly comforted apostle should be reminded, moreover, that his present conquest of pride and self-will would not be accepted without the sharpest possible tests. With such a bitter ending to his work it was expedient that Peter should have timely knowledge of what was yet to come, and should prepare himself by prayer for the stern conflict of blood. For the discipline and perfecting of John's character no such ordeal as this may have been needed. The life of the beloved disciple proved itself one of quiet and loving service, with little persecution in it, as those rough times went. He did not need to be equipped by prophetic warning for a great tragedy of woe. The different types of service and suffering appointed to the two men may explain to some extent Christ's different methods of dealing with them.

Peter's question concerning John threatened *an unseemly encroachment upon Christ's sovereign rights*

over the work and destinies of the disciples. Christ had first called, and then, with His own blood, redeemed the twelve, and had so established a supreme claim to determine all that concerned them, and it ill became the disciple, who had forsaken his Master in the agonising moments that made His ransomed servants an inviolable possession, to arrogate to himself what looked very much like a co-assessorship with the Master, in fixing the lot of the several disciples. Peter's question assumes that he has the right to say something on the subject. The temptation to officiousness and egotism presents itself in the golden moments of his restoration, and whilst he is hearing a strange premonition of the manner of his own death. He asks about the after-career of the humbler and more steadfast disciple at his heels, as though he were godfather, and must needs inspect and review and certify the counsels of the Lord's providence concerning him. No wonder men came to believe in the official supremacy of Peter, for in his less watchful moments he believed in it himself, and we are accustomed to take men at their own estimate. But the Master admits Peter to no place of primacy over his fellows, He puts upon him no sponsorship for their work and welfare, He pays no respect to his assumed right as spokesman, and will not consent to place the threads of the future in his hands. The risen Lord must needs remind Peter that his duty is to follow, and imitate, and obey, and not to judge; and to do this will employ all the thought and strength he can bring to bear. He is misconceiving Christ and his own relation to Christ. As Jesus appears with the prints of His death in hands and feet, the witness of a perfected

redemption, and the pattern of every Divine excellence, Peter is in danger for the moment of making Him into a magnified fortune-teller. No wonder the question was repelled. Christ fixes the life and determines the service and suffering of His disciples as He thinks best, and will have no intrusion upon His prerogative. The sanctification of Christ's blood rests upon that life and service, and every question that trenches upon Christ's royal right as Redeemer is an impertinence.

In His rebuke of Peter Christ perhaps did imply that John's life should be longer than that of his contemporaries, but even that is not very specific. It may have been necessary that the youngest of the twelve should be spared as a link between Christ and the succeeding century. But such matters belong to the wisdom and authority of the Master Himself to settle. If He think well, the one who leaned upon His bosom shall be exempt from the bitterness of martyrdom, and translated without seeing death, or he shall be kept with a charmed life upon earth, the venerable patriarch of a new dispensation, vying with Enoch and Methuselah in his stretch of days. The Master does not hold Himself bound to adjust the incidents of one life to those of a contemporary life, or to establish any kind of equality between the careers of disciples who stand side by side. It is not fitting that Peter, in the hour of his restoration, should intrude into matters that are entirely within the province of the Lord Himself to define and appoint. The crown right of redemption belongs to Christ and not to the chief apostle, and Christ will rule in His own kingdom. It is enough that Peter is suffered to feed the sheep without determining where the sheep

shall be pastured, and what adventures shall befall his comrades, the under-shepherds, and when the under-shepherds and the several portions of the flock over which they watch shall be called back from the bleak hillsides and received into the jasper city. Peter must follow Christ, not pry into the secrets of His administration. Questions like that put by Peter not only distract the thought from the obligation of personal devotion and obedience, but they ignore the difference of position between the exalted Master and the immature and unproved disciple.

Duty, Christ intimates, is the most important part of destiny, and the purpose of His Word is to guide and train and strengthen in duty, rather than prematurely to unfold the romance of our after-days. Indeed, we make our own history as we go along, and there is no fortune worth talking about other than that which we work out for ourselves by successive acts of obedience to Christ. It is idle for us to seek to know the things that will befall us in the after-times, for whatever is vital springs out of ourselves. Peter's question perhaps implies that duty and destiny are not uniformly interdependent things. Fit occasion and opportunity are necessary to achieve the work of the man or of the apostle, and no man without tragic ordeals in his life could ever hope to sit on the Lord's right hand or left. Are there grand openings in the man's pathway? Will he have the chance of distinction? Can he write his name on some page of the world's history? That is the false view. He does great things who obeys the call of duty, and there is no term that can be put to the honour opening out before that man who sets himself steadfastly to follow Christ. The foredetermined incidents of a

man's history are the least important things about it, mere dust poised for a moment in the air and gone. The day comes on apace when conduct will count for everything. The life of man must be cherished not so much for the romance to which it may give rise, but for those spiritual qualities that reach fruition there. Life may be ensheathed in splendour, and full of imperial occasions, and yet beggarly in its issues. Personal loyalty to Jesus Christ is the one interest which must absorb our thought and strength. If we could know our own destinies or the destinies of those to whom we are attached, it might be a temptation to supineness or a demoralising distraction. We might find ourselves in the position of the man who rests upon the gifts of fortune, and never shows the world one tithe of what is within him. Unnecessary preoccupation with the affairs of others may blind us to the force of individual obligation and betray us into faithlessness. The future of the disciple is with Christ no less than our own, and we must be quite content to leave it there. Do not dissipate the strength needed for personal service in amiable officiousness about the concerns of others. It is your high privilege to follow Christ. His voice calls you, and if you follow you will allure other feet into the same pathway of honour and immortality, and add something of value to their destinies.

The craving for romance, which sometimes takes quite a religious form, is the sign of a *restless, unsatisfied, insufficiently exercised mind.*

Two things ought to have brought absolute contentment to Peter on this fair, early summer morning by the quiet lake shore: the thrilling incident of his own *forgiveness*, and the *new vocation* coming from

the Master who had so graciously restored him. Oh, the marvellous face in which it seemed impossible to find a frown, and that beamed sunshine once more upon the despairing apostate's head! Here was room enough for all the quiet wonder of which his poetic nature was capable. What unfathomed depths in this matchless generosity! This hour with the Master should have been an unbroken psalm of praise. But Peter wanted, by reading an unopened page in the history of John, to get away from his own humiliations, to escape the hand that had been probing his conscience, to forget the wound dealt by the gentle ministry of his Lord to his pride. If men and women would submit to know the worst about themselves, and then be content to receive the free forgiveness and healing extended to them by Jesus Christ, there would be less of this feverish craving for romance, less eagerness to pry into the concerns of others, or, failing to find that sufficiently exciting, to live in an imaginary world. And then Peter ought to have found the vocation just defined, and for the fulfilment of which his newly-received forgiveness was to inspire the motive, full of endless interest and fascination. In after-days he came to find more than enough for his thought there, and if he had been fully awake now he would not have been so eager to rush off into a side-issue. The grace that gave to him the privilege of caring for Christ's redeemed flock should have cured the last spasm of restlessness and brought the profound contentment of established love. His susceptibility to the romance of the unknown was the proof that his nature had faculties which the vast interests of his work at present did not satisfy. If life is not sufficiently interesting to us, if we cry out

for that which more effectually stirs the blood, if we want sensation, be it in our own lives or in the lives of those about us, that is a sufficient proof of the fact that we are not alive either to the infinite privilege of our forgiveness, or to the vast duties and responsibilities that are laid upon us, and that we cannot be permitted to decline.

The life of a city, in spite of its struggle and hardship, is far nobler than that of the gossipy, inquisitive, romanceful village. The busybody seems inseparable from the life of the stagnant, sleepy hamlet, where the people have not half enough to think about, and the very clay that cleaves to their boots seems to get into the brain and clog its movements. The next-door neighbour does duty for book, newspaper, lecture, concert. In the tattle of his inquisitive acquaintances a man is betrothed, married, made rich, brought to the workhouse, dies half a dozen times, and touches the extremes of all baseness on the one hand, and all heroism on the other, not once or twice only in the course of one short life. The village would die of *ennui* apart from the opportunity of speculating upon the little details of his history. His past is the subject of village tradition, his present of village criticism, his future of village prophecy. The poor folk have not enough to occupy their brains and use up all vacant faculties in diversions of this sort. But do not let us be too hard on the village. Now and again we find traces of the same temper in the towns. Those people who impersonate the genius of the village, and spend much of their time in personalities and social and domestic forecasts and fortune-telling, have not quite enough to do to absorb their powers. Curiosity is sometimes idle, sometimes

envious, sometimes good-natured, and sometimes a compound. The supply of romance in actual life is so stinted in comparison with some people's demands that they are driven to spend the larger proportion of their thought and emotion upon purely fictitious characters. The study of an occasional novel may be very well as a literary recreation, but the inordinate passion for it is the symptom of an unoccupied mind, a mind that neither knows the measure of its own privilege or duty.

This same temper sometimes takes on the forms of piety. Men gloat over prophecies about the immediate future of the world. They revel in grotesque speculations about the ten heads, and the two witnesses, and the drying-up of the Euphrates, and the pouring out of the last vials. Such subjects, however loud the piety with which they are mixed up, take the mind away from duty. The man who knows the measure of his Lord's forgiveness, and realises what the work is he has been set to do, will have no care for these extravagances of pre-millenarian soothsaying.

What an entertaining book the New Testament would become if we could forecast each other's destinies by a study of its pages! A biography that dealt with events still hanging in the air by the sheer force of its fascination would push all fiction out of the world. We have biographies written by friends and biographies written by enemies, and biographies written by the modest men who are the subjects of them, but biographies of living men written by gossipy prophets, speaking with an approximate degree of truthfulness, would cause an unprecedented rush to the circulating libraries. Such biographies

would be immeasurably more interesting than the most popular of the Society papers with their sketches of "Celebrities at Home." But Christ speaks for some higher purpose than to help people to prophesy about each other and to minister to the romance of the world.

And Christ's Word is no more meant to help us to prophesy about the fortunes of nations than it is to prophesy about the fortunes of individuals, except so far as those fortunes are the fruit of conduct. Fanatics arise from time to time who look upon the Bible as the grand horoscope of the nations. We may allow that they are pious, although a little more piety would save them from their fiascoes of exegesis. If John's contemporaries had possessed less of Peter's curiosity and more of John's quiet and loving devotion to duty, they would have been under no temptation to foist a prophecy into Christ's words concerning John. The Book of Daniel, or the Apocalypse, its New Testament counterpart, is the shrine of the international fortune-teller. He spreads the curtains of its symbolism about him like a tent, and tells us what is to become of Rome, and Turkey, and Russia, and France, and Germany, and Great Britain. The mantle is that of Daniel or John, but the voice is that of some pre-millenarian mountebank. "Lord, what shall this Church do? How will the map of Europe run after the next great war? When shall the forces of Gog and Magog close in deadly conflict?" Very interesting, of course. But all that brings the Divine Word into contempt and takes us away from the obligation the Lord places upon us. It fosters unsanctified curiosity, a feverish thirst for prodigy and omen and pious melodrama. The mes-

sage to us as to Peter is, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me."

Christ's Word needs for its correct interpretation *a delicate and unprejudiced logic* that can only be exercised in quiet and unostentatious moods of the soul. Precise grammatical criticism may sometimes be necessary if we are to do justice to Christ and His sayings. The first disciples befooled themselves and laid their Master open to the gravest misconception because they ignored the conditional mood in which Christ had spoken concerning John. Perhaps the honour in which the early Church held the Apostle Peter may have blinded many to the fact that Christ had rebuked him and refused to directly answer the question he asked. The prepossessions that swayed them may have led them to put their own gloss on Christ's words. In all probability they shared the curious, prediction-craving temper of Peter, and were eager for the strange, the piquant, the romanceful. And this desire to see the wonderful in the history of the infant Church and its leaders led them astray. They dropped Christ's all-important "IF" and made His statement categorical. In John they came to recognise one proof against the darts of death, and justified the view by a careless tradition about Christ's words. But for John's correction of this error in his own lifetime, the death of this last apostle might have been an irreparable disaster to the early Church. The word of Jesus would seem to have been falsified, and the faith of many a disciple would have been wrecked, and the mouth of the scoffer opened wide.

Holiness and infallibility are not convertible terms, but there can be little doubt we should be secure against nine-tenths of the errors into which we fall if

we were delivered from prejudices and preconceptions that have a close relation to defect of character, and learned to cherish the quiet, undistracted, duty-loving spirit inculcated in Christ's words to Peter. We sometimes assume we may have religion without the close study of God's Word, and think piety is all that can be asked even if it is divorced from intelligence. The Bible is quoted as though it gave some kind of sanction to this view, and we are reminded that "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." But the way referred to by the prophet is the way of holiness and not of prognostication. Good people do err, but we are apt to encourage them in their errors by allowing too large a margin for human infirmity. Error is minimised as men become morally and spiritually perfect. We learn too much Scripture from each other and too little at the Fountain Head. Be accurate, and to that end be spiritual. It was the temper of wild, unsanctified sensationalism which led to the misinterpretation of Christ's words.

These words, penned in the closing days of St. John, show *the suspicion with which he regarded mere tradition*. He passes an unmistakable stricture upon it in this last paragraph of his Gospel, and implies that it must not be accepted as uniformly trustworthy. Luke in the opening, as well as John in the closing, words of his record, recognises the necessity there is to sift and correct reminiscences of Christ passed by word of mouth from one to another. The largest religious community of Christendom puts tradition on an equal footing with the New Testament. Roman Catholic theologians have sometimes written about the Bible in a style befitting the blatant unbeliever of the market-place for the sake of enforcing the sup-

posed necessity of supplementing the written Word by the traditions and authoritative interpretations of the Church. The ritualist will sometimes allow that he can find no trace of his special dogmas in the apostolic epistles, but then he falls back upon the traditions of the early Church and the writings of the Fathers. Alas for the argument! John himself pricks it in the words before us. The error in reporting and applying Christ's saying about the beloved disciple was all but universal in the primitive Church, but it was an error all the same. As much careless and irresponsible talk was current then as in the Church to-day, and we may be thankful that it has not all come down to us. We sometimes deplore the fact that we have only fragments of Christ's life. But we have all that is needful for salvation, and what we have is so sifted that it may command our unlimited confidence. We should scarcely be the gainers if the whole body of contemporary tradition was before us, for there was not a little alloy in it, and that which has survived the fire is gold. Let us show our loyalty to the Word by searching out its clear, definite teaching, and abiding by it. Some of us do not like a gloss to be removed from the text of the Bible, or a time-honoured interpretation of any of its sayings, however unsound, to be brushed away. The man who holds himself bound by mere tradition is a child of falsehood, and does not honour the Master who is truth. We gain more than we can ever lose by scrupulous accuracy.

How much more perfect the word of Christ would seem if we would lay aside the idle and barren questions we sometimes bring! By trying to extort from it replies to interrogations that are beyond its proper

scope we undermine its authority over ourselves and impair its influence in the world. Jesus Christ is quite content to let the newspapers monopolise the idea of a column for answers to inquirers and correspondents. Do not let us expect Him to furnish the material for our essays in history, science, or romance. If the Bible is falling in the esteem of our age we are responsible for it. We have put about it the atmosphere of our own frail suggestion, and it is sometimes difficult to say where the erring self ends and the unerring Bible begins. We dandle it as though it were a rubber doll to be pinched and twisted into any shape the fancy of the moment may dictate, or made to speak and silenced at our demand. We bring our folly into partnership with its wisdom, and the world can scarcely tell to what extent the Bible is responsible and to what extent its fallible devotees. Address the deepest questions of the conscience to the Bible, and without hesitation or ambiguity it will answer them ; but if you seek to glut your curiosity at its shrine it will say bluffly, as Christ to Peter, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." The gospel is Christ's voice, and it speaks not to divert or entertain, but to guide, to save, to redeem. Meet it on its own level, and do not expect it to descend to your caprice.

Some years ago, in company with two other tourists, I climbed the highest mountain in Norway. The evening previous to the ascent we engaged a guide at what seemed to be rather a heavy charge, but were told that the crevasses were many, and that we should need to be roped together to cross them, and possibly there would be places where steps would have to be cut with the ice-axe. We must have a

first-rate guide, and the guide would need to take an assistant, and, all things considered, the sum asked was not excessive. The next morning a little boy of not more than ten summers presented himself at the door of the hotel who could speak just one word of English, "Yes." "Where is the guide for whom we have paid in gold?" "Yes," was the somewhat dubious reply, and the little man pointed us onward to the mountain. We began to think ourselves cheated, and to rate our quondam guide. "Yes," was the soft answer returned to our wrathful scoldings, and the infant mountaineer smiled and nodded, and with outstretched hand pointing towards the peak, strutted onwards. In a somewhat sceptical and ill-tempered mood we followed him for four or five miles, and at last found our practised guide with his ropes and ice-axe awaiting us at the edge of the snow-field. He was not going to spend his strength in leading us over the foot-hills and saving us from wet shoes by pointing out the best way across the morass. The child could do that just as well.

And in the same way the Bible meets us at the dividing line between our mortal and immortal natures. Just where the natural ends and the spiritual begins it patiently waits, ready to lead us up into realms of spotless white and out into the sublime immensity of God. For our guidance on the lower ranges of life we have the historian, the dramatist, the man of science, the social philosopher, the political economist. Do not expect Christ to make special revelations concerning the interests that are purely transitory. His Word will answer every question of the moral life, will save you from tragic pitfalls, and will direct and uphold your footsteps in

your march towards God and the peace and blessedness which dwell under the shadow of His throne.

It is interesting to remember that some thirty or forty years later *each of these two disciples spoke again upon the subject of prophecy*, and to each had come in the interval a most notable elevation and enlargement of view. St. Peter tells us that the prophets "prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow" (1 Pet. i. 2). St. John also tells us that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. xix. 10). Each had come to see that it was the special function of prophecy to deal with the Master rather than with the individual adventures and experiences of disciples. Its aim was to anticipate His coming and to extol His work when it had been fulfilled. It had little concern with the separate fortunes of the disciples, and that for the best of reasons—the destiny of the true disciple was bound up with that of the Master, and the whole Church would share at last the honour and victory of its Lord.

If you could prophesy about the future of the tree you would need no prophecy about the health and fruitfulness of the separate branches, for they partake the fortunes of the tree. If you could say of a man he will become a millionaire, or he will wield a sceptre, you would not need to prophesy about the future of his children, so, at least, that they remained dutiful members of the family circle. If the father becomes rich it will be their own fault, and their own fault alone, if the children are beggars. If he comes

to wear a crown they of course rise to be princes in the same event. If you could anticipate the future of the British throne you would anticipate at the same time the future of its possessions and dependencies. The smallest island colony will rise or fall in the splendour or the abasement of the throne. The destiny of the disciple is bound up with that of the Lord, and does not need its separate prophecies. If I am His servant, dying in His death, quickened in His resurrection, hallowed by the unfailing ministries of His mediatorial life, the power of His enthronement will compass me about all my days, and the splendour of His exaltation will at last reflect itself into my immortal being. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Everything is frivolous, however large it may bulk in the passing moment, that lies outside our relation to Christ. A century hence the question, Did he become rich, or was his life a perpetual struggle with no earthly success to crown it? was he famous or obscure to the very end? was his career even and smooth, or thorny and full of pain? will not be worth the asking. The only question of the slightest moment will be, Was he a disciple? Did he follow Christ? Was he accepted in the Beloved? Relegate to their due obscurity and insignificance all the side-issues of life. Let Christ's words to the restored apostle, "Follow Me," ring in your ears and solemnise your hearts and keep you steadfast in your look towards eternal mysteries.

III.

THE PILGRIM LIFE, AND ITS DEFENCE.

"I am a stranger in the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me."—PSALM cxix. 19.

THE Jews never seem to have lost sight of the fact that they were the descendants of a band of pilgrim forefathers. In the most brilliant periods of their history they still regarded the life of the roving patriarchs as a type of their own. Just as the sharp nervous impressions of the parent not infrequently infix themselves in the temperament of the child, so the sorrows, privations, solitudes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob left a mark upon the instincts of the race, and through successive stages of the national life haunted the genius of Jewish thought with a mood of sadness.

The sense of brotherhood was more exquisitely developed amongst the descendants of Abraham than in any other race of proportionate numbers and influence; yet it never quite prevailed over a sense of inward aching desolation. Large numbers of our fellow-countrymen feel themselves aliens because they have no stake in the soil, and land is unequally distributed. Such was not the case, however, with the twelve tribes to whom Canaan was apportioned by

lot. Attachment to the holy soil became a passion of unrivalled fervour, even in those who had not been schooled by exile into a lover-like devotion to fatherland ; and yet this fond affection for the soil notwithstanding, the Jewish nature was ever haunted by a sense of the loneliness of life.

The confession of Abraham as he stood asking from the children of Heth a place for his dead, that "he was a stranger and a sojourner," finds an echo in the prayer of David as he consecrates the treasures that have been offered for the building of the temple, "We are strangers and sojourners, as all our fathers were." It makes itself heard again in the prayer of Hezekiah when he compares his life to a "shepherd's tent." Peter exhorts those to whom he is writing, "As strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts." The same refrain surges back again from the Epistle to the Hebrews, "We have no continuing city."

This sense of the disquiet, limitation, homelessness of life was obviously religious in its origin. The larger nature just awakening in the Jewish race could not be satisfied by a life cramped in its opportunities, beggarly in the term of its duration, built on a quicksand of fugitive moments, and passed under fitful and chequered skies. The disappointments arising out of all present earthly things only stimulated the quest for a better commonwealth, a more abiding city, a loftier law.

And this half-sad yearning for the permanent and the spiritual is wider than Judaism. In literatures that cannot have been influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures we meet with this idea, that man's days on earth are a pilgrimage. Chinese writers speak of

the present life as "an inn." The most famous of them all declares that human "life is a journey, virtue is the burden man is called to bear, and death is the stage at which the burden may be cast aside." He did not seem to find in virtue, however, any counterpoise to the limitations of life, or guess that it might prove the passport to a better destiny. The burden of the Chinese sage becomes the basis of the Psalmist's triumph. Righteousness is fitted to give him a vantage-ground from which he may smile at the ills and vexations of mortality.

An Asiatic general, who was leading an army against a hostile city, is said to have ordered each soldier to carry a sack of earth as he went forth to the siege. As soon as the beleaguered city was sighted each soldier was filed out to empty his sack of soil at a certain distance from the city walls. In this way a rampart was built from which the stronghold was stormed. The burden became the platform of conquest. That virtue, the maintenance of which is to the Chinese sage a load, a task, an impost, becomes to the Hebrew Psalmist the foundation and the vantage-ground for a great victory over the woes and weaknesses and privations of mortality. "I am a stranger in the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me."

This figure of the pilgrim life suggests the vicissitude, the isolation, the helplessness, and the probationary hazard and uncertainty which confront us in the present world.

I. The prayer of the Psalmist recognises in the disclosure of God's will to the soul *the best counterpoise to the transitory character of life.*

The figure of the stranger or the sojourner

suggests the thought that man's life on earth is a scene of daily change with a tragic revolution at the end of it in which all the preceding changes seem to find a cumulative expression. This wonderful planet, with all its strength and wealth and resource, to the preparation of which so many epochs have contributed, is but a camping-ground. We are under canvas for a short series of manœuvres only. The strongest palace is a mere tent to be taken down, the most massive temple a tabernacle of the wilderness that the coming storm shall rend to shreds, the mightiest earthworks and fortifications ridges of sand to be wiped out by the next tide, and the most ingenious and closely-compacted civilisation an insect's web to be torn from its holdings by the rising winds of the night. We are not in permanent possession of the soil. Kings and nobles are squatters who may be dislodged at a moment's notice. The best title-deeds are temporary leases, and for the most highly privileged there is no security of tenure. Like the Semitic patriarchs, we are now at Shechem, now at Mamre, now at Beersheba, and then gone never to revisit the places of our sojourn. Life is impermanent as a Bedouin encampment spread out at the sunset like trees beside the water-courses, and before sunrise swallowed up past recall into unknown deserts. The tents seem to have melted into space like the spheres of a larger and more palpable dew.

Or, to bring the figure home at the risk of sacrificing its poetry. Somewhat prosy Bedouins itinerate in our midst, living in tents on wheels, and pasturing their lank steeds at the four-lane ends. Our life is as changeful as that of the bronzed wanderers of our village byways and country commons. Some of us

affect gipsy rank and royalty, and command the rest. Or we pride ourselves that we manufacture better kettles and brooms and clothes-pegs than our neighbours, and sell them for a few pence more. Some are more industrious than others, and we make it our boast that we at least never live by loafing. But we all belong to the wandering race, and are in no sense children of the adamantine cities. We pitch our small caravans for a day, and before we know it the fair is over, and the white horse is harnessed to bear us out at a slower or swifter pace into the cold mists beyond.

We look upon the dexterously woven hues of earth, and inhale the sweetness of its unfolding life for a few golden hours. We contemplate its skies of sapphire clearness or its ruby blushing sunsets with the sense that the pageant is but for the twinkling of an eye. The mountains as they watch around us seem to half pity our fugitive existence, and to tacitly claim that they belong to a more enduring order, and shall see the last of us. All races have been oppressed by the brevity of life, and have mourned the tragic interruption that must inevitably overtake it in some such strain as that before us, although the Psalmist's prayer has not always taken wing out of the depths of the Psalmist's plaint.

However little life may seem to be worth the having, men instinctively cling to it. The life woefully disabled, incurably sorrowful, is cherished as though it were the seed-plot of the most gladsome possibilities. Coarse and torn though the tabernacle may be, regrets always attend the taking down of the fabric. The systems which have proposed the extinction of all consciousness as the grand aim of their discipline

are influenced not so much by the idea of the vanity of life, as by the mockery that seems to lurk in a terminable life. Like the condemned prisoner who attempts suicide to escape execution, the Buddhist seeks refuge in mental death by meditation before the terror of physical death takes hold upon him. By persuading himself that existence is a curse he tries to take the edge off mortality and mock the stroke of the scytheman. The fugitive element in life has weighed upon the human heart everywhere, and left its record on all national histories and traditions. Kings have fitted out expeditions to go in search of the elixir of immortality. Mediæval chemists have worked themselves grey-headed in their laboratories whilst attempting to find a specific against death. Devout philosophers have built up ingenious arguments to show that it is only the husk of human life which decays in the grave, for chemical change cannot blight the high thought and love of man's spirit; and of course the argument is perfectly valid and, in its due place, inestimably useful.

The Psalmist's method surpassed these in its wisdom and Divine simplicity. He would have accounted it no gain if his existence had been only animal, and were destined to indefinite perpetuity under animal conditions. He had the confidence that if he could only be made fit for the vast opportunity, he would outlast whatever was fugitive in life. Let all the ranges of his nature be spiritualised and uplifted by the inspoken law of God, let him be but trained under God's code to co-operate in the Divine economies, and his life would become worthy of the preserving care of the Eternal. His concern was not so much to possess immortality as to be fit

for it. He constructs no argument, equips no expedition, cries for no impossible nostrum. By a nobler path he seeks the assurance of immortality. A divinely inspired sense of obligation to a deathless King and Lawgiver would be the best counterpoise he could possibly have to the fugitive elements of the pilgrim life.

It may possibly seem to the cursory reader that the inward proclamation of the Divine law and the passing away of life have no logical relation to each other. Why does the Psalmist group these apparently incongruous ideas in his prayer? In what way could the inward revelation of God's will compensate for the sorrow arising from the thought of mortality?

The Psalmist had been brought to feel that *God's law imparted its own imperishable attributes* to the nature that received and assimilated it. Those who say that the Old Testament contains no indication of a life beyond the grave surely speak without due study of the question. Of course its testimony is not so bold and oft-repeated as that of the New Testament; yet so far as the Jew understood the profounder meanings of Divine law he came to have in himself the assurance of immortality. Law, springing as it did from the very soul of the Eternal, shared His deathless essence, and called man into a fellowship that was centred beyond the realm of the fading senses. Law was no question of caprice, expediency, temporary adjustment. The germ of an indestructible vitality was present in it. The Psalmist felt that in receiving it he was clasping what could not pass away. "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in the heavens." Away from the shifting scenes of sense, and beyond the fitful clouds

drifting over a world of change, he discerned from afar a stable life possessed by those obedient to the will and word of God. There at least was something standing out from the fluctuations of the pilgrim life, marble cities that could not crumble, princely fellowships that could not be broken up, noonday lights that never faded through shades of melancholy purple into the glooms of midnight, blooms that never cankered or shed their petals on the damp autumn earth, high-ringing songs with no dying cadence in their notes. The connecting pathway between the perishable life here and the imperishable life there was law. That pathway somewhere crossed the cruel gulf dividing between the two. But the gulf was full of mists that shrouded the significant pathway. Oh, that the mists were dispelled! Oh, that the law, which was the bond between the finite and the infinite, might be made clearly known! "Hide not Thy commandments from me." The voice that speaks law into our souls proclaims our immortality. It is, after all, the trumpet of jubilee that peals from the granite crags of Sinai, waxing louder and louder. It makes us free to return to our inalienable inheritance. "Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever." The eternal heritage implies a deathless heir. We sometimes think of law as though it came to take rather than to give, as though its spirit were the very antithesis of the gospel, mere duty, oppression, irksomeness. All law is set to a music that can assuage the griefs of our mortality. Even the Book of Proverbs with its secular wisdom yet recognises that the way of obedience is the way back to the tree of life. "Wisdom is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her."

By the gift of law *God seeks to restore His faded image* to the soul, and so vindicates man's immortality. The moral capacity to which the Divine Lawgiver addresses Himself distinguishes man from the brute, whose spirit goeth downward. There is an element in us which is proof against all the changes of earth, and it is this element which God's revelation comes to feed and expand and perfect. The Most High could not proclaim our kinship with Himself more impressively than by the promulgation of those precepts which are the ruling principles of His own character. It is in this way that He calls and fits us for eternal fellowship with His Spirit. The very insistence upon the law of eternal righteousness to the conscience of a man implies his immortality. The commandment comes to perfect and glorify what is stable and death-defying within us. Its accents deliver us from the depressions bred by thoughts of our cold, dark sleep in the grave.

The New Testament revelations of the future life proceed in harmony with the doctrine involved in the Psalmist's prayer. When Paul thought of the torn tent and the weary, wasting, home-sick pilgrim it half overspread, he turned for consolation to the daily deepening life of regeneration, and contemplated the hope it enshrined. "The inward man is renewed day by day." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews felt that the law of the New Covenant placed beyond all doubt the imperishability of the kingdom Christ had set up, and the immortality of those who received its final and absolute principles. It is true God had put the stamp of His high authority upon temporary regulations that belonged only to the pilgrim life, but the New Covenant replaced what was tempo-

rary by what was strictly and essentially eternal. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only." "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." In his Epistle John indicates that the temper of obedience connects itself with the assurance of a benediction that outlasts the fitful moods of our mortality. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." In the Book of the Apocalypse John's thoughts run again in the same channel as the Psalmist's: "Blessed are they that keep His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life."

II. The figure of the sojourn suggests the idea of *isolation and homelessness.* The pilgrim is compelled to spend his days away from friend and kin and father's house, and finds life among strangers more or less sad and loveless.

The world cannot possibly prove itself a home to even the most favoured of our fellows, because human society, for the present, at least, is in no sense a brotherhood. The first half of a man's life is usually spent in acquiring the art of making himself at home in the sphere into which he has been dropped, and the second half in slowly unlearning the lesson. The solitude and desolation of the human lot is more bitterly felt in old age than in childhood and youth. The more protracted a man's sojourn here, the more mournful the mood of distance and strangeness in all the voices around him. Places change for us, and we change so much in ourselves, that if they could be even stereotyped, we should still seem to be living in a chaos of dissolving views. He whose good or evil fortune it is to be moored to the same spot of ground for the best part of a century is made to realise the longer he stays there that locality is a factor of ever-

declining value in his earthly portion. Time changes the dyes of the clouds, the grouping and gradation of light and shade on the landscape, the social atmosphere a man breathes, the very plan and tone and structure of the homestead. Strange with the cruel strangeness of other lands grow the scenes in which we were favoured nurslings, where the flowers seemed to smile their benediction upon our hearts, the birds to trill familiar greetings, and the meadows to invite us to soft carpets of grass and clover and cushions of primrose. Our hearts are just as much chilled in these scenes to which our tenderest life once shaped itself, as in the scoffing city crowd. The encampments to which we have joined ourselves are ever breaking up and swarming out in new directions. Those whose lot was once cast by our side, and continued converse with whom would have sensibly brightened our lives, are removed by death, or carried elsewhere by the exigencies of health or business. New generations come in that lack those pulses of fellow-feeling we could always find in our contemporaries. The greatest stranger is he who has been longest on the ground ; he is one of the dispossessed aborigines, a prehistoric proprietor who has to take the place of a waif and stray, a hewer of wood and drawer of water to the usurper of yesterday. To see old men trying to fortify themselves against the ravages of time by courting the friendship of the young, is a pathetic sight, especially when we remember how disappointing the expedient often is. The social entity to which we belong is like a ship striking on the rocks at the meeting-point of many streams, which breaks up into fragments and floats away in a dozen different directions. And, as though

the separations caused by the hand of fate were not sufficient to make life sad and homeless enough, the human heart is ever doing its best to add to the inevitable schisms and separations of life. The Confusion of Tongues repeats itself every few years. New Babels spring up in taste, politics, philosophy, religion. All sympathy is partial. Within us there are cravings that the best friendships cannot satisfy. The richest measure of love the earth offers is inadequate to the vast demand within us. We are strange to our own brethren. An alien life invests us on every side, and its icy touch chills us to the core.

The corrective to all this loneliness will be found in a more vivid view of Divine law, and the new sense of congenial and far-reaching relationship it calls forth. A less discerning man would have prayed, "Let friends be raised up to walk with me in my lone and weary way. Spare, oh, spare those nearest to my heart, and let my home circle be long unbroken. Let the peoples on every side draw into alliance with me till I become a nation." The Psalmist saw that truth and uprightness would call forth response and create relationship and dower with a wealth of love of which the most sensitive human heart could not even dream. He had a glimmering of the truth Christ taught at Capernaum, that mother, sister, brother would prove phantom forms of love, apart from the doing of God's will. Devotion to Divine law brings men into abiding contact and harmony. Fraternities would be created by it that time could not change or unsettle. The law weds the life into which it breathes itself with the life of the celestial hierarchies. When the Divine commandment enters

with all its ennobling power into human nature, man ceases to be an isolated point on the expanse of the great universe. The solitary pilgrim becomes the friend of God, and the lonely and dispirited wayfarer a king ministered to by angels. The man to whose inmost nature God's Word comes soon finds himself at home everywhere. Principalities and powers are his treaty allies. He can link hands with the princeliest angels. The empire whose defences encircle him stretches to the uttermost term of space. He is a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows how the member of the New Covenant is linked to the throne of God, the community of angels clustered round it, and to all "the spirits of just men made perfect." "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven." After this amazing fashion does God set the solitary in families. To such supreme privilege, association, fellowship are those admitted to whom God's commandment is effectually revealed, although they were at first but aliens, outcasts, fugitives.

III. The metaphor of the sojourn suggests *the idea of helplessness and perplexity.*

The wayfarer in a foreign land often finds himself dazed and half-terrified by the strange scenes and associations through which his journey takes him. The flowers at his feet may secrete death under their silken petals. The insects that buzz around him, unlike those he chased when a lad in his native land, may be charged with mortal venom. A missionary traveller in Bechuanaland brought himself and his companions into imminent danger of death by using

honey from a bee's nest discovered on one of their journeys. The bees in that strip of country found their supplies of honey in a poisonous flower that abounded there. On yet another occasion the same traveller drank of a pool by the way, and was seized with pain and delirium. The pool had been poisoned by the natives for the purpose of making the wild beasts that came to water there an easy prey. He who walks on strange soil must take heed to his steps. The very vapours that rise around his encampment may be clouds concealing the angel of destruction. The laws and customs of the alien peoples with whom he is in contact for a little while are a tangle of uncertainties. A thoughtless act may land him in grave and unanticipated complications. He is not a part of the permanent community. His resources are limited, and neither friend nor representative is at hand to take his part in the day of need. Every passing form is eyed with suspicion, for it may conceal a foe. He is powerless in the grasp of crowds that are of other speech and blood to his own, and they may perchance scoff at his softest and most skilful persuasions. Bent with weakness, wasted with privation, tremulous with hourly fear, the sojourner needs to wisely meditate each successive step unless it is to issue in calamity and death.

And is it not thus with every thoughtful man in his brief sojourn upon earth? He may sometimes be betrayed by his own inexperience into incalculable mischief and disaster. The unwary youth now and again wakes up to the fact that he has been inoculated with the passion for gambling, or has passed almost unawares into the category of the drunkard and the

sensualist. Man is here for a time only, and never attains complete mastery over the conditions of his life. The dominating forces of the world seem evil, and man is the sport of them. Nature acts as though she were strange to us, and not infrequently cruel. One day she becomes our tempter; the next she treats us as though we were scarcely a recognised part of the universe. We say many things in her praise, and she requites our eulogies as though we were alien elements on the scene, of which she is anxious to be rid at the earliest possible moment. We are made to feel that, like Cain, we are fugitives on the earth, to whom no sure refuge is open. In the scheme of things in which we move there are hints of the inhospitable, the unfriendly, and the remorseless, which sometimes stab us to the very heart. At the very best the shadow of the unknown is always haunting us.

The inward commandment will bring wisdom and strength and courage to counteract all this. "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light: it giveth understanding to the simple." He is safe against harm who, through the reception of that Word, proves himself a son of the light and of the day. Just as the pillar of fire dispelled the fears of the Israelites, and made their desert march a triumph, so God's Word scatters the misgivings of the pilgrim, and makes his progress through life's mysteries as fearless as the child's rambles through the chambers of the home in which he has grown. By asking God to inscribe the law into his heart he puts himself within the arms of an unfailing Providence, and makes himself of the number of those concerning whom the mandate is uttered, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My

prophets no harm." Sympathetic discernment of God's law will ever prove itself a protecting panoply without flaw or weakness.

"I will never forget Thy precepts, for with them Thou hast quickened me," is the testimony of this unknown writer. The inspirations of the law restore those who are ready to faint, upraise to new life and vigour those who are at the point of death, and impart resurrection virtues that change tremulous weaklings and fevered, footsore wayfarers into doughty captains and heroes. The Divine commandment solves the soul's perplexities, knits up its courage, dispels its misgivings, and by the trumpet blast of its high authority rallies the universe to man's side. It makes the famished, threadbare, downcast wanderer into a crowned king. By obedience to the law a man becomes so intimately identified with God that he finds refuge and redemption even now from the crosses, privations, infirmities of the pilgrim life. The Psalmist did not pray, "Screen me from the malice of my adversaries; conduct me by safe and quiet paths; clothe me with power that will enable me to tread under foot the adder and the dragon." Such a prayer would have been quite orthodox—but may we not say superficial?—in comparison with the cry, "Hide not Thy commandments from me." This goes to the root of things. If a man be only brought into God's highway of holiness he may laugh at lions and ravenous beasts and all hurtful things. All that and much more besides comes to pass when God teaches the secret of sanctity to an obedient heart. In all the goings out and comings in of their eventful pilgrimage God's servants are clothed with His all-sufficient strength, and kept from harm.

IV. The Jewish mind was accustomed to associate the pilgrim life with *the idea of probation.* Significant solemnity attached to it because, though brief in itself, it had an all-important relation to a more stable life that was yet to be.

This thought of the probationary aspect of man's ever-shifting life upon earth may have been suggested by the histories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God tested the fathers of the elect race by their long and eventful wanderings, and having seen their fidelity for many years, at last welcomed them into His own mystic city. He led those who came out of Egypt for forty years in the wilderness to try them and prove and see if they would keep His commandments or no, and alas! multitudes showed themselves unworthy and perished.

It was more, however, than the traditional interpretation of two or three fragments of past history that led the reflective Jew to see the probationary character of the pilgrim life. The life of change naturally suggests the thought that the destiny is still trembling in the balance, and the destiny is obviously undetermined because the character has not yet received its final imprint. This lot of alternating good or evil tends to become all good or all evil as character comes to show its deep and dominant qualities, and to take upon itself enduring form. Life is an untrodden or a but half-trodden path, and as we refuse or accept the guidance of God's law, may lead to the desert from which there is no return or to fountain-laved gardens of bloom. This bit of our existence is but the prelude of what is to come, and we strike the long keynote here.

And these changeful experiences best befit the

purpose of our stay upon earth. We have a chance of getting away from our past with its evil habits and associations and its soul-stinging memories. Travel is sometimes prescribed for the cure of a young man who has fallen into a fast and dissolute life. He must be taken away from his old companions, made to forget the scenes of his revelry, and of the shame and failure that goad him to despair ; and if he could only be kept out of bad company on his grand tour, the remedy would be very good indeed, as far as human remedies are concerned. Our pilgrimage on earth is appointed to do some such thing for us in the Divine scheme of our education. We are taken out of our old associations. Life is made new for us by the changes that come. The scenes that stand like grim monuments of our unfaithfulness pass, and the very flight of the years helps us to get into an atmosphere of quiet respite where we may bring ourselves face to face with the all but incredible fact of God's great forgiveness. And on the other hand the good man is kept on the alert by changes of earthly fortune, and prevented from losing the gains of his early religious life through stupor and indifference. The pilgrim lot appointed to us best suits the probation we are set to fulfil upon earth.

The brevity of our present life, say some, is a sufficient *disproof* of the old idea that it is probationary. In an economy of faultless equity no enduring disability and privation can follow momentary failure. A temporary act cannot possibly have an infinite result. Are we sure of that? Cause and consequence do not show themselves coextensive in their range when looked at in the light of God's natural

government. The forgetfulness of a moment sometimes issues in half a century of anguish. Five minutes' sleep in a signal cabin may darken homes in many places for years, and bring a thorn into the heart of the sleeper that shall pierce till the last beat comes. It is impossible to establish an equal time-relation between an act and the reward or punishment that follows the act, for every act arises in a thought, and every thought occupies precisely the same length of time, so that principle would exclude all degrees in the administration of rewards and punishments. The ages of the after-life will take their rise in the moments of the present, and it is that which makes our opportunity so supremely solemn. The occasions of our earthly sojourn are rare, and pass with swiftest wing, and we need grace to seize them. Loss, irreparable loss, must come to us if God's commandment is hidden, and the light that is in us turn to darkness.

The imperfection of knowledge does not preclude the idea that our present life is probationary. It is said again and again, "Our knowledge here is so limited that it is quite inconceivable that very much should turn upon it." The argument looks in the other direction. It is limited in some things that it may be all the more intense in others. The very limitation tends to focus and concentrate and emphasise. Our minds would be carried away from those elementary conceptions of duty which are vital to salvation if our interminable curiosities were satisfied by an exhaustive revelation of the mysteries of existence. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." It gives us light upon all essential questions of practical obligation, and that is

what we need for our salvation, and an excess of light might hinder rather than help it. If a man were walking in the blackest night upon the edge of a precipice it would not contribute to his safety to have meteors flying through the sky or dazzling lights kindled on every side of him. That would baffle and distract, and might possibly destroy. The illumination resting upon his pathway would be less strongly defined. He needs his footsteps lighting, and his footsteps only. The safety of our coast depends upon the fact that we only put lighthouses where they are needed. If every bay and cove and headland were picked out with lamps like the shop-fronts in a national illumination, the master of the ship would not be able to recognise his course, and wrecks would multiply a hundredfold. God's Word at least lights our footsteps, and that is enough to guard us against the portentous hazards of our probation, and the safeguard might be less perfect if revelation were practically unlimited in the range of its subjects. Moral light is never kept back from those who welcome it, and that light we must have if we are to pass without hurt through the stages of our critical earthly life. A conscience sensitive to the point of troublesomeness is an endowment not to be despised. Unless God keep alive within us a keen sense of obligation to His own eternal and unalterable ethic our journey through life will be a pilgrimage of blindness, jeopardy, disaster. Where God does not reveal, the god of this world will surely blind.

Let us live worthily. Some to whom it is the fashion to pay court spend their lives in raking into the mere litter of the encampment. Let all idolatries of the perishable be abjured. Carlyle somewhere

speaks of the silly and tainted pleasures with which so many of our fellow-men occupy themselves as "blown egg-shells." Let us see to it that these are not the treasures we accumulate in our progress through life, or strange and cruel laughter will greet us in the end.

We shall soon pass out of our temporary and fragile tents into the enduring city. Will it be into the foul, fire-fated, contentious Sodom of the reprobate or into the shining metropolis of God where His holy ones are daily gathering?

IV.

THE NEW CITIZENSHIP: ITS POWER AND PRIVILEGE.

"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." —LUKE x. 20.

IT is sometimes said that in speaking of unclean spirits Christ falls into the current phraseology of His times as a matter of expediency, and does not intend to put His imprimatur upon the traditional ideas underlying these expressions. In the words addressed to the seventy, upon their return, He does much more than that. Besides postulating the existence of unholy and malevolent spirits, He takes it for granted that all the existing agencies of evil operate in subordination to a great mysterious leadership, and that the tie of dependence and association is so close, that to wound the head in the supersensuous realm is to wither up the members who act in the sensuous realms of human life. The present subjection of evil to the authority of these Galilean peasants He traces back to a representative fact of dramatic impressiveness, a fact in which the visions of a pre-incarnate life and the dim dreams of a far-off future seem to blend. The hosts of darkness

had been enfeebled and panic-smitten because their prince had been thwarted and thrown down. He had seen the guilty archangel, in his primeval intelligence and power, and in the splendour of his early progress, swift and far-shining as the electric flashes of the storm, and in his arrest and overthrow helpless as spent bolts when they have once touched the earth, "fallen as lightning from heaven."

That magnificent overthrow of evil in the sphere out of which Christ had come, and to which He had still ties, unknown even to His nearest disciples, connected itself with two great facts: the vantage ground occupied by the disciples when face to face with the evil forces that were asserting themselves in the world, and, what was immeasurably more significant, their power against those insidious forms of evil that were sleeping unsuspected within their own hearts. It was out of their enrolment as partners of a celestial commonwealth, and their admission to the freedom of the city of God, with all the power and privilege and distinction it implied, that the later and more significant conquest was to come.

This prefigurative triumph over evil in the sphere of the unseen was a genuine cause of rejoicing, especially in view of the peculiar character of their future work. The Gentile world to which these seventy were commissioned to go was looked upon as the stronghold of every form of demoniac power. Some from the number of the seventy might chance by and by to find themselves in harsh conflict with surviving forms of devil-worship, and be ready to quake at the thought of the sinister forces of supernaturalism with which they had to wrestle. From time to time they would come under the influence of

the wide-spread superstition that evil was stronger than good. Of course they were theoretical believers in the Omnipresent power of Jehovah, but that belief did not always count for the full measure of its value. Whilst asserting that God was supreme, they sometimes debated with themselves whether He did not give the evil one a tether far too long for the safety and comfort of the saints. Who could tell but that they might hereafter be left to the mercy of their spiritual adversaries? That in their first mission they should receive this pledge and foretaste of victory, was matter for sincere congratulation. And yet the interest of the fact was, after all, but subordinate. Their own enrolment in the kingdom of heaven was an event of immeasurably vaster significance—the greater thing, in fact, that comprehended the less. The individual grace bestowed upon them in common with all the sincere followers of Jesus Christ was far sublimer than the official grace that had been bestowed in view of the special work to which they had been commissioned.

This metaphor of the enrolment under which Christ describes the elementary power and privilege of His true disciples blends conceptions, growing up out of two types of citizenship, with which Christ had been familiar from His boyhood—the Jewish and Roman. In Christ's lifetime the one was almost entirely religious in its prerogatives, and the other political.

We can trace the metaphor back through Prophets and Psalms to the times of the Pentateuch. Moses speaks of a book which God had written, and in which his own name stood linked with honour and blessedness. At that time there was only a clan registration of the names of the children of Israel, and

just as the heads of an associated group of households kept the record of names which determined questions of birthright, inheritance, power, privilege, so God kept a roll which certified the coming grace, honour, enrichment of those whose names had been placed there. When, centuries afterwards, the census roll was kept in the tabernacle and temple, it became a still more expressive symbol of the record kept on high. It denoted primarily religious privilege by inheritance and temporal benefits in so far as they were the outcome of the right and faithful use of religious privilege. Whilst the roll was the title-deed of each man's inheritance at the partition of the land, it was much more significantly the charter under which he could claim the blessing promised to Abraham and to his seed. Unless a man had been put out from the congregation for some deliberate and shameful transgression, and his name solemnly blotted from the roll, the record treasured within those sacred precincts officially asserted for each man comprehended in that enumeration a place and portion in the religious commonwealth rooted and centred in the temple. The service of sacrifice and official mediation touched him. Access to the consecrated courts was his birthright. When in the spirit of conformity to the dictates of Divine law he sought to pass into God's pavilion and presence-chamber and hold converse with the King, no power on earth could bar him out. The prayers offered before the altar arrayed the ever-victorious hosts of God against his adversaries, and every benediction pronounced there brought some soft cadence of peace into his spirit. And yet in the last days of the theocracy the privilege of incorporation with the

elect race and all that it implied had become a mere fiction. There was no power behind the privilege, for God had withdrawn Himself from His faithless people. The priests could not enforce, unless by the sufferance of the Roman conquerors, the rights of those whose names stood in the temple archives. The guardians of the temple were helpless against the armed forces of the pretorium, and at last the temple was desecrated, the rolls of citizenship given to the flames, and these sacred rights annulled.

But in His idea of citizenship Christ not improbably comprehended conceptions drawn from that Roman type with which He had been long familiar. For all the common ends of life that enrolment gave throughout every part of the known world invincible right and influence and defence. Rome made her law supremely strong, and the life of the man who was under its protecting shadow sacred as that of priests and kings. The man invested with this citizenship might be friendless, afflicted, a wayfarer beset by aliens thirsting for his blood, a dwarf amongst giant warriors, a Lazarus tempting the unenfranchised Dives to make sport of his evil conditions, and yet he would prove himself at last strong as the united legions of Rome. His real power must be measured not by length of limb, or girth of chest, or force of sinew, or talents of gold, but by the range of imperial conquest. The fact that his name was inscribed as a Roman citizen affiliated him to the valour and chivalry of Roman arms and to all the majesty of Cæsar's throne. Out into the mists and snows of Northern Europe, away into the hot, shimmering deserts of Africa, deep into the dusky forests of Scythia, and by the wrack of stately

empires on the banks of the Euphrates, Rome was ever pushing its power for the defence of its feeblest citizens. The rights of these poor Galileans may have often gone to the wall before the rights of the freemen of Rome. If the name was inscribed upon the official tablets the solid fact would be promptly recognised, the proud claim allowed in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Greece, Persia, India. And from every clime an enrolled citizen had right of access to the life and splendour and privilege of the great metropolis itself. No power could bar its gates its courts, its spectacles against him. Cæsar would hold himself bound to vindicate every right of his citizenship. It was no little thing to have one's name in the lists of those who shared so noble a franchise. To be enrolled in such a metropolis was a better thing than to be an Arab sheik, a Persian satrap, a petty Asian king. Whilst Christ took the Jewish form of citizenship to represent religious privilege, He might well take the Roman form to suggest sure, widespread, impregnable power and defence.

The New Covenant enrolment implied all that could be set forth by these two types of citizenship. In a temple not made with hands the roll of God's elect is securely kept. If our names stand upon that sacred roll it means that we share to the uttermost the gracious and incomparable mediation carried on for men in the presence of God. The lips of the great High Priest never move but grace descends upon us through their tender intercession. His holy hands are never outstretched in benediction but the peace diffusing itself from the high priestly act flows down to steep our natures in its sweetness and dispel the storm from our pathway. No spiritual ministration

is accomplished there from the efficacy of which we are shut out. God in Christ, and all the resources He commands, are ours. We participate at every point in the great spiritual commonwealth whose metropolis is Mount Zion, which is above. The book on whose page our name stands is the Domesday Book of the new kingdom established in Christ Jesus, and nobody can go behind or beyond that record and dispossess us of our high inheritance. We have the right to enter in through the gates into the city, and to dwell in God Himself, who is the shrine of the city's life.

There is a loftier majesty than that of Roman power maintaining the law which redeems and absolves and enthrones us. "Who is he that condemneth? It is God that justifieth." Mean, helpless, unchampioned though we may be in the eyes of men, the very filth and offscouring of all things, we are the wards of that throne around which ranks of angels cluster in willing obedience. A power vindicates our spiritual citizenship and enforces its rights more compact and colossal than the world's history has ever known. Divine Providence reaches out the arm and sceptre of its infinite defence immeasurably further than Rome ever reached forth hers. That very triumph over the mysterious powers of evil in which the disciples were rejoicing implied their names were written on high, and the mandate had gone forth that they must be upheld. The legions of darkness that trampled and possessed the world would flee before their presence. The Lord God Omnipotent would vindicate these lowly ones who had been born into the kingdom of heaven. No army could destroy the archives on which their names were written, abolish the charter of their freedom

and privilege, or take away their part and place in the holy city. Interest in all the ministrations of heaven, defence from all the perils of earth, joint-heirship with Christ in His kingdom, are implied in this matchless enrolment.

Two facts are here compared with each other. The first fact is, that in pursuance of the defeat that has crushed evil at its very source and centre, those agencies of evil which provoke not a few of the diseases and distempers of mankind are subordinated to the power and authority of the disciples. The second fact is, that in attestation of the new citizenship received by the disciples, their names have been inscribed in Divine archives. Christ affirms that the second is the nobler and more significant fact of the two, and worthy of loftier jubilation and more gladsome gratitude. This discriminating exhortation probably rests upon three or four closely connected reasons. This enrolment suggests *a broader and more complete view of the disciples' dignity and blessedness* than the special fact which was absorbing their thought. The memory of it is fitted to be *a more influential force in the perfecting of the character.* The grace which effects it brings a more *adequate revelation of the Divine grace and gentleness.*

I. The gift of this new citizenship suggests *a more comprehensive view of the power and true felicity of all followers of Jesus Christ* than the comparatively narrow circumstance that was monopolising their thought. The subjection of evil spirits to their will was an outlying incident of their vocation, an effect that lay upon the mere fringe of their new prerogative. In waking up to the favoured place they were to fill in the kingdom of God they would attain the

very spring and centre of those lofty possibilities Christ had come to establish and announce. Signs and wonders were temporary and to some extent adventitious, but to be admitted to the freedom of God's city was the root and beginning of all lasting power and benediction. A Roman citizen enfranchised by an act of imperial grace would have shown a very inadequate appreciation of his rank if, after finding some swarthy savage treat him with deference, or some shaggy bandit retire from his pathway, he had gone about boasting to the end of his days of that crowning advantage of Roman citizenship. The favour of Cæsar, the opportunities opened to himself and his children, the distinction to which his freedom might prove the pathway—all these things were nothing in comparison. His patent of citizenship was a charm to overawe bandits and barbarians, that was all. Such a man would rightly be called a short-sighted fool, quite unworthy of his honour. The disciples were verging upon an error almost as drivelling and derogatory as that. They must be warned against looking at one corner of their fortune only, and boasting of the subjection of demons to their word. The labourer does not sing harvest songs and call friends and neighbours together to hold high festival because an instrument has been put into his hands which will cut down to the deepest roots of the twitch and thorn, and he has succeeded in striking a spark which has kindled his rubbish-heaps of weed into bonfires. That would be a silly misjudgment of the proportion of things. It is in the luxuriant sheaves and in the praise of the Lord of the harvest that he must rejoice. The cutting up and the crackling of the consuming weeds is but the first prepara-

tory step to that. That this power should have come to the disciples was but an elementary incident in their vocation.

The endowment in which they gloried, and the sense of which was thrilling every nerve with a strange enthusiasm, was but the fringe and not the essential substance of their privilege as members of a celestial commonwealth. Because of their enrolment all the hosts of heaven were enlisted on their side, and compassing them in their goings out and comings in like a mighty body-guard, and it was a little thing that the emissaries of evil should be cowed by their word. Spheres of unutterable sacredness were opening to their footsteps, and the throne of the Most High was their eternal home. All good was summed up in the grace that had written their names above, and was sealing them for the great redemption. The shrinking away of the rulers of the darkness of this world before their footsteps, as they went forth to publish the gospel of peace, was not the supreme end to which they were to look. They had received a citizenship around which priceless and imperishable benefits were clustering, and they must rejoice in that.

II. The fact of which Christ reminds the disciples tends to fuller edification, and is *better fitted to uplift and perfect character* than the inferior fact which was absorbing the thought of the seventy.

An unregulated rejoicing in the power of exorcism might have led on to *a perilous political inference* and put in jeopardy the destinies of the future faith. The Jew had long looked upon all Gentile governments and civilisations as informed, controlled, and consolidated by demons of darkness. The sinister influence of the spirits wooed in idolatrous worship was the

hidden cement, binding into a vast superstructure all the organisations of Pagan life. This sense just awakening within them of mastery over principalities and powers might have speedily become more than a harmless sentiment. Unarmed and unlettered disciples strong against Apollyon! If nursed within the brain that thought might have taken a new turn, and have led on to a revolutionary conclusion. Strong against Apollyon, and strong therefore against all the godless human tyrants wearing crowns and wielding sceptres, who were Apollyon's visible instruments. If these evangelists had trodden under foot spiritual dominations, why not the flesh and blood epitomes of these dominations in Roman camps and citadels at Cæsarea, Mount Tabor, and Jerusalem? Primitive Christianity would have lost the harmlessness of the dove had this thought once taken root, and would have rushed upon its adversaries with fire and sword. It is needless to speculate what would have been the effect of that upon the after centuries. Unless jealously watched and controlled, a sense of power in spiritual spheres will transform itself into a sense of power in the political world, and degenerate in the process. That is the lesson of Ultramontanism. We can only be simple, blameless, benign representatives of the faith of Jesus Christ if we chasten and restrain our consciousness of the endowments that come to us, and rejoice chiefly in the free, forgiving grace of Christ to our spirits. The man who is ostentatious in his assertion of victory over the powers of evil puts his own future usefulness in peril. The pride which so often frustrates a vocation and cancels the best hopes of our history will vanish as we contemplate the grace which welcomes rude,

sinful, insignificant men into the kingdom from which angels were cast out.

It was in the constant apprehension of this foundation privilege that there lay *the deep and permanent secret of power.* By glorying in the lower fact they would be tempted to self-exaltation and jeopardise their further possession of the power already bestowed. Indeed the intermittent character of their power may perhaps be explained by the temptation to self-vaunting under which they came. And this is always the peculiar danger of popular evangelists as well as of men trained in the traditions of sacerdotalism, who assume that they glorify God by magnifying their office. It seems to them quite obvious that an extraordinary endowment must put them in a higher category than that in which those stand who have only received common grace, and they forget that the grace in which all share without partiality is a vastly more significant and precious thing than the grace with which they may have been endued for some uncommon work. They are apt to look upon the special gift entrusted to them as a tribute and testimony to their own worth or importance, and they forfeit even the common grace by the pride and self-sufficiency to which they have been tempted by their work or office. Many of our fleshly passions have a strange habit of reappearing under the new conditions of the spiritual life. Vanity and ambition sometimes present themselves in the habiliments of piety and zeal. These disciples had mortified many of their worldly aspirations, but here the old leaven was working in novel and fantastic forms. The victories of their mission became a peril to lowliness and simplicity. They were tempted to

revel in the mere sense of power. The lust of dominion was seeking to satisfy itself in the new kingdom. How easy was it to account their power over mysterious maladies a compensation for that earthly pomp of which they had been disappointed! It was safer and better for them to think of what God's grace had done for them, than to think of the heroic feats they had been achieving at Jesus' word. A new danger always arises when we see that we are not only passive subjects but active instruments of the Divine grace, and if the latter fact obscure the former all true power goes, and our talent is taken away. Let us rejoice that our names are written in heaven, for it is not by an act of personal power that this wonderful enrolment is achieved. The foremost of the seventy could not put his name there by a chivalrous and heroic feat of his own. Let us think not so much of what we have done and are doing, but of what is done for us. That will fill us with humility, and safeguard us in the grace we have received.

At a yet earlier stage in his ministry Christ was quite alive to this particular form of danger. In the Sermon on the Mount He declares that in the day of His judicial enthronement many should assert that they had prophesied and cast out devils and wrought wonders in His name, and all the time they had been aliens whom He did not know, and their marvels were no offset against practical wickedness. In their fussy and egotistic parade of zeal and power they had forgotten their own moral defects. It may be that the prerogatives of office and the consciousness of some preterhuman gift may have been the very things that betrayed them into Pharisaism and moral disaster. In their own natures there was secret affiance

and correspondence with all unholiness, whilst they were ostentatiously seeking to do Christ's work in driving back the gloomy, afflictive agencies that were working in the minds and bodies of men. If ever the slander of the Pharisees was true that the devil was cast out by collusion with the prince of devils, it must surely have been in cases of this class. They could not be loyal subjects of the kingdom, true freemen of the city in which Christ reigned, if at any point in their lives they trafficked with God's adversaries. They lacked all the moral qualities consequent upon the enrolment. It is quite possible for a man to follow in the footsteps of Judas, and thrust himself into the front rank of the disciples, and participate in their most striking works, and be ruined by his own desire for pre-eminence. If we have power of any special kind it is never safe to think about it. Never rejoice in endowments that may make you conspicuous or clothe you with forms of authority that are sweet as the honeycomb to your taste. Rejoice only in the marvellous grace you share in common with all Christ's followers.

This thought Christ accentuates is better *fitted to quicken fervent and catholic love to God and the brotherhood* than the thought on which the disciples were tempted to dwell. The distribution of miraculous gifts proceeds upon a basis of particular election, and if that be the standpoint from which we choose to think of God, not only will our conception of the Divine character be narrowed, but the spirit of partiality and schism is sure to arise amongst the disciples. It is easy for us to get into the way of supposing that the Apostolic Church, with its striking gifts, was the very apple of God's eye, and that we

stand in a somewhat more distant relation to Him, just as in the Church at Corinth it was assumed that those to whom abnormal inspirations came were the chosen favourites of the Most High. And the Roman Church has fostered this error by teaching that the power of working miracles is one of the attributes of the higher saintliness. In our present-day conflict with unbelief we are especially prone to exaggerate the value of the marvellous. What a boon if God would only be pleased to raise up a succession of apostolic healers and exorcists! We should then be able to make short work with the agnostics. It would be a mark of peculiar favour to our generation if the Spirit would only restore to the Church her early endowments. Such dreams are ignorant misjudgments. God shows far more favour to us when He sets a stumbling penitent on his feet and writes his name in heaven, and He does that every day. The power God breathes into us of practising the normal virtues of the Christian life is incalculably more than the power of accomplishing abnormal marvels. The faith, hope, and love which are the earthly countersigns of the name written in heaven are more than tongues, healing, or prophecy. Perhaps Paul had this utterance of our Lord's in mind when he penned the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. The strange gifts which had appeared in such singular profusion at Corinth were to vanish away. Were the best things forsooth to prove evanescent, and the second and third-rate things only to remain? Was the spotless and glorious Church, in which tongues and healings and prophecies had ceased, to be less loved by the Lord than the rude, struggling primitive Church? Perhaps the least

emphatic marks of the Divine favour may be those to which we attach the most importance.

In far-off ages Alps and Andes and Himalayas were upheaved into the sky, and then left by the denudation of the surrounding soils at the heights of solitary majesty they now measure. But do you suppose the force which seemed to bring these mountain ranges nearer to the sun, and placed the hidden treasures of darkness within easy reach of the hand of man, left the lower levels of the earth void of productive power and barren of mineral wealth? The plain yields fruit as ruddy tinted and glows with corn as heavy-eared as the mountain-side. Under the common levels of the globe there lie hidden as much gold and silver, as much splendour of topaz and amethyst and diamond, as in the uplifted strata of these towering hills. And is it not thus with God's grace and lovingkindness? Just as much of its wealth and splendour and fruitfulness underlie the ordinary life and privilege of discipleship as are present in conspicuous supernatural gifts. Common grace must be valued at a far higher price than official. The act which made the Galilean peasants freemen of the city not built with hands, and inscribed their names in the Book of Life, illustrated Divine mercy in its uttermost length and breadth and height. Pride of vocation might be encouraged if they thought of their own special gifts and endowments. Love of the one Father of all, and catholic fellowship with His obscure and scattered children, would be stimulated as they thought of the grace and privilege belonging to every disciple alike. To remember our common inheritance ought to stir us up to a more fervent love both of God and man.

The thought to which Christ turns the minds of the disciples is the *source of spiritual strength and victory.* The other thought could not possibly bring with it the same persuasive to unworldliness ; indeed, a new temptation to worldliness might arise out of it. In the Apocalypse St. John tells us that the only men who resisted the spell leading the nations to worship the beast were those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We do not give sufficient prominence to assurance as a spring of ethical power. No wonder we fail so egregiously, for we do not confidently rejoice in the fact which is the motor-centre of spiritual strength and victory. The sense Jesus Himself had of His Sonship was His safeguard in the hour of conflict. The tempter knew that well enough, for his successive appeals took the form of dilemmas that were designed to make Christ doubt His Sonship if He refused to attempt the acts to which He was urged. "If Thou be the Son of God." That fact once doubted, all had been gained by the tempter, whether Christ obeyed the practical challenge or not. We shall prevail if we hold fast to the grace of which the registration is the witness in heaven. The thought of our adoption into God's kingdom and family will so move our hearts that they will be purified and strengthened. Such a passion of love will be awakened within us by contemplating this transcendent token of the Divine goodness, that our fidelity will become firm as the hills ; and the new sense of spiritual dignity which will be begotten within us will make the world's pomp and power a paltry show at which we shall smile with Divine disdain. The flatteries of the world, the blandishments of the symbolic beast, the lust of what is sordid and perishable,

will dominate us if we lack the love inspired by the thought that God has written our names on high and the wisdom that comes down to guide God's elect as they walk through realms of sinister hallucination.

The thought that our names are written in heaven *will help to conform us to the spotless life centred there.* It will be remembered how St. John, who was possibly a hearer of the counsels addressed to the seventy upon their return, reverts again and again to the metaphor of the elect enrolment. Of the new city he says, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie : but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." He does not think it needful to specify the moral opposites of defilement and abomination and falsehood. It is enough to say the happy souls possessing this wonderful city were written in the Book of Life, and that implies the rest. With the enrolment as citizens there came moral and spiritual power to separate from sin and to meeten for the untarnished life of heaven. When the forgiving God writes our names on high the act is not empty or formal only. With the pledge of citizenship He gives the transforming forces that fit us for its surpassing honours and responsibilities and kingships. A knowledge of that high grace emboldens us to expect the presence of a ministry within us that will fit us for our destiny, and even now uplifts our natures into practical participation in that life of which we have been made a part.

III. The thought to which Christ invited attention was pregnant with a *more adequate revelation of the Divine character* than the thought which was so

pleasing to the seventy. That God should be viewed as lifting up lowly and despised disciples to the highest pinnacles of privilege, rather than casting the rebel spirits into abysses of shame and darkness and defeat, was a more glorious subject in itself, and replete with more inspiring thoughts of God. This defeat of the agencies of evil by the word of power Christ put into the lips of His disciples was part of the stern doom destined sooner or later to overtake them. It must surely have been one of the bitterest ingredients of their overthrow that they who had imposed their wills upon kings and conquerors, and deemed themselves arbiters of the world's best prizes, should have had to retreat before these weak and mean and foolish dependents of Jesus. Such was the destined recompense of that pride which had given rise to their separation from God. In this stinging doom of abasement the retributive wrath of God was strangely illustrated. But such severe displeasure God would gladly have kept in everlasting reserve if the moral conditions of the universe had only admitted. Harsh theologians have sometimes spoken of God being glorified by the damnation as well as by the deliverance of the creatures He has fashioned. The Bible scarcely justifies the use of such language. Tragic and final ruin, when it overtakes either man or demon, is one of the painful reluctances of the Divine economy, the last resort of an outwearied God. God scarcely glorifies Himself in this way, although He does vindicate His righteousness. There is an air of mournfulness about Christ's spirit as He thinks of the doom of these once holy spirits, and restrains the thoughtless jubilation of the disciples. They shall have at least the respect accorded to fallen kings.

He would rather have the character of His Father judged in the light of that gentleness which has taken these despised names and inscribed them in the Book of Life than from the standpoint of that terrible wrath which has hurled the offending prince and his rebel hosts like lightning from heaven, and given the last touch of completeness to their defeat by placing them under the heels of these Galilean disciples.

In the Book of Judges we read how, when Gideon had overtaken the Midianites and bound their two kings, he bade his firstborn son arise and slay the royal captives. In this crucial conflict for the honour of God and the purity of worship he desired his son to have a part he should never forget. He wanted him to share his own sense of power against the adversaries of the Lord. But do you think Gideon would have cared to have the question of his fatherhood judged from the standpoint of this tragedy, even if the son had been stout-hearted enough for the act? Would not Gideon have thought himself very much misrepresented if the lad had gone about boasting that his father had given him power against the lives of Zeba and Zalmunna, and the proud triumph of the hour had blotted out all thought of the father's wisdom and kindness in bygone years, and all gratitude for the inheritance Gideon was guarding for his descendants? Evil has been conquered by the moral chivalry and devotion of Jesus Christ, and in all its forms and operations it is placed under the feet of the believing disciples. The Father has given us power to tread on serpents and scorpions, but we must not judge His character from this narrow standpoint. God would rather be thought of for the gentleness and compassion He has shown in enrolling

our names amongst His elect, and making us a people who were not a people, rather than by the casting down of our adversaries—by the priceless inheritance He has prepared for us rather than by the pains brought upon those who kept not their first estate. It is true He humiliates those faithless ones who were once standing before His face, but we must not think so much of that. We must rejoice and delight ourselves rather in the mysterious goodness which accepts and seals and fits for infinite blessedness us who were once of the kingdom of darkness and far off even as others. It is by that God is best glorified.

To the devout mind Nature is a compendium of the many-sided character of God, and all the phases of character illustrated there have their appropriate notes of emphasis and subordination. We find thunderbolt and lava-stream and earthquake. But do you suppose God would have us judge Him by the electric terror that zigzags through the forest of oak and shrivels the branches? Would He have us find the clue to His dominant attributes in the fierce lava-stream that hisses from the volcanic crater and wends its way in slow, sluggish, smouldering ruin through orchards and vineyards? Would He have us perceive Him chiefly in the awful earthquake which entombs human habitations and rips the mountains into weird, bridgeless chasms? Had that been God's design, He would have made our daily path lurid with the forked lightning, and caused lava-streams to flow through the world like rivers, and convulsed our quiet life with hourly earth-throes. Rather would He be known to us by token of the blossom and golden corn that come to clothe the black lava-fields; by the glossy creepers that girdle

with their flowers blasted oak-trunk, and hide away under wreath of honeysuckle the ruin of the lightning; by the opulence of fern and lily and trailing orchid that come to beautify with their splendours the black gaping chasm left by the earthquake.

And in the realm above that of nature God would not have us trace Him chiefly by the pathway of His judicial lightnings; not by the defeat He inflicts upon the captains of evil, or by the power He commits to His lowly people to trample on the legions of the pit, would He be judged; not as devouring fire withering up natures of vast spiritual splendour that once peopled the celestial firmament would He be chiefly known to us. He would not have us stand agape for ever before the chasms made in the hierarchies of heaven by the mighty punishments that have alighted there. He would rather be known by a beneficence that comes to clothe with new spiritual life the old desolations, a redemptive grace that fills up the places of the fallen angels in heaven with the lowly children of men, a meek pity that bows itself to earth to gather there new love and loyalty and worship with which to adorn the forfeited thrones and replenish the terrible vacancies of the past.

These words imply *a doctrine of assurance.* We cannot rejoice in a fact that is unknown, debatable, half-proved only. The banquets and bonfires and processions which celebrate a great national victory only follow well-attested news. It might prove a bitter mockery to initiate such celebrations whilst there are only vague rumours or expectations of conquest in the air. It is always foolhardy to make large drafts upon an uncertain future; and till we have well-attested knowledge of the fact we cannot

rejoice that our names are written in heaven. It is a poor quality of gladness we get by guessing and hoping merely. To the first disciples Christ Himself was the witness who could not lie, and the work of that faithful and true witness is continued by the Spirit which perpetuates Christ and His message in the midst of the Churches. There is the witness on earth as well as the witness in heaven. This is a tabernacle of witness no less than that. Led by the Spirit of God, then do we confidently know that we are the sons of God. Beseech the Spirit by contrite prayer, walk in His light, and then shall you have indeed cause for this soul-purifying and soul-perfecting joy. A witness shall be written within, a true copy and transcript of the blessed record on high which the angels read.

V.

THE PROVIDENCE OF THE TRIFLE.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."—MATT. x. 29, 30.

FOR but few of the lives around us can we care, however imperfectly, and it is difficult for us to believe in a Providence encircling our pathway which cares with a complete and unfailing insight for such infinitesimal things as hairs. The kind and wise providence of God is the one thing that scepticism sets itself to assail with ingenious and unceasing ridicule, and if we continue to confide in it we must do so in a perpetual storm of assault and contradiction. Some of us, I am afraid, confide in it with unconfessed reservations, and that explains the prayerlessness, the worry, the dreary dubitations, the grim stoicisms, the half-concealed despairs in which we are apt to pass our days. It often seems as if God thought as little of the destruction of a human life as though it were the mere dropping of a hair. As a matter of fact, He thinks solicitously of both. His inscrutable providence controls all that lies between these vast extremes.

I want to traverse a few popular objections to the doctrine of a Divine Providence rather than to deal with the subject after a more positive method. If our scruples and prejudiced suspicions are dissipated, we shall find ourselves irresistibly led to believe that the economies of God's government are benign, unforgetting, and all-comprehensive in their matchless vigilance.

Our objections may be grouped under two heads. I. It is inconceivable that an Infinite Being should have the will and the power to care for such trifles as are specified in the New Testament. II. The results, as far as we can observe them, are unsatisfactory, and scarcely sustain this ideal of an all-discriminating Providence. The first objection is only half-articulate. We should find out how unworthy it is if we were to speak it out. The second objection we proclaim without any sense of shame from the housetops. The first is whispered, the second bawled in our hearing after every fresh disaster or calamity.

I. We are so earth-bound that *we half suspect the competence of any being to exercise a providence over motes, atoms, and infinitesimal details.* We are not sure that we honour the Infinite by such a conception.

Now in all this we *apply entirely false and artificial analogies*, and so judge God amiss and distrust the providence which is over little things. As a man rises from point to point of power in human economies he is excused the tiny affairs lying on the mere fringe of life with which common people must needs busy themselves. When he gets to the pinnacle no one expects him to give thought and care to miscellaneous detail. The head of a firm dealing every

day with undertakings which involve thousands sterling would feel himself insulted if required to hunt up a mistake in the pence column that has crept into the ledger. That must be done by a junior clerk in the office who is paid a few shillings a week. It would be an indignity to the general of an armed million of men to bid him go the round of the ranks in person to see that each button of each soldier's gaiter was in its place. That better suits the rank of sergeant or corporal. The great historian never thinks of spending hours in verifying a reference for some subordinate date. That must be done by one of the young students, who is only too proud to act as scout and purveyor for a gifted professor. It would be an insult to the Queen to expect her to go about the corridors of Windsor or Balmoral picking up pins, or to spend the hours due to the contents of the royal despatch-box in kitchen cares. Cheaper and less honoured functionaries must do that kind of thing. The one who wears the crown jewels and draws the biggest salary from the national exchequer must think through the symbols of cabinets and fleets, colonies and empires, and make the million a unit of calculation. It is the prerogative of those in high places to deal with aggregate facts and interests, but even then to deal successfully with these they must now and again go back to a scrutiny of the trifling factors that count into the whole. That is because you do not increase a man's capacity for work by pushing him up. The man at the post of commanding influence has little if any more capacity than when he was at the bottom of the scale, and if you lay upon him momentous affairs you must excuse him from trifles in the same proportion. Nature does not so add to

his talents as to fit him for a plurality of positions.

The great man is distinguished from the mean by the quality rather than the superficial area of his work, and it is vain to expect the highest excellence where there is a straining after prodigal versatility. A man must contract his field and concentrate his energies if he is to shine in art, literature, government. It is no sign of majesty, but of littleness, however, that a man in power, or one setting himself to some superb task, cannot spend himself on trifles. Do not assume that we belittle God by believing that He overwatches little things, for we magnify Him. It is the tribute we pay to His infinitude. In many things we are compelled to think of God by the analogies of human life, but let us beware of judging Him by the poor measure of our limitations. That a great earthly potentate touches central and passes by extraneous things is a mark not of greatness, but of circumscribed capacity, and the thought that a providence over the trifle ill befits the majesty of God is entirely and only Pagan. He is not an exalted mortal only. He can care at once for the essential and the petty details that may by and by be found to be the very substratum of what is essential.

Our *own carelessness about details* in the lives that crowd our daily pathway makes it difficult for us to believe in Christ's doctrine of a providence that regulates trifles. We do not think it our duty as a nation to undertake responsibility for the preservation of life and liberty amongst newly-discovered cannibals. Malays may run amuck and Red Indians divert themselves with scalp-hunting to their heart's content in the territories where no British flag flies.

We cannot interfere, for we have our own burning questions to settle, and are jealous of any extension of the empire. It would be madness to talk about caring for men's hairs. We do not trouble ourselves very much about the sparrows and starlings and blackbirds, and we are quite content to give a free hand to farmer and gardener who would gladly see them exterminated for the protection of their produce. We could not entertain for a moment the Buddhist ideal of caring for the inferior kingdoms of life as fondly as we care for man. We call to mind those who have gone far afield to find philanthropic tasks they should have found within their own families, and we justify the diminutive and parochial scope of our interest by the old saw, "Charity begins at home." It is only a point in the unmeasured area of human life, not to speak of other uncounted realms of life, that we can touch by our sympathies. How incredible that God should fulfil a providence that includes the meanest things in nature!

The indifference that warps our judgment of this question is made up of two things—*sheer selfishness and rigid limitation of power and opportunity*. It is difficult to say which should be put first, for it is not always clear which is cause and which effect, and in what order of time they are related to each other. The action of these two things is perhaps reciprocal. Selfishness shrivels resource, and the shrinkage of resource seems to justify our selfishness.

Our carelessness to many things in the lot of the great majority around us seems to be imposed upon us *by a natural necessity*. It is inevitable; for the stores of help and counsel and sympathy we can bring into play are very circumscribed. We are only

able to care for the most essential things even in the lives of those dearest to us. If our first father Adam had been endued with the gift of earthly immortality he could not care for his myriad sons and lay by for their necessities, any more than you and I can care for those who represent attenuated cousinships to us through Adam. If Abraham were still upon the earth it would be quite impossible for him to care for every pallid and unkempt descendant of his line who may be stitching himself into the grave in one of the sweating-shops of East London. The mother would soon weary of her babe if it never grew in strength, intelligence, and power of self-support, and begin to think what a mercy it would be if God would take it to Himself by death. Her unwearied and pains-taking ministries of love are a rare climax of which she is capable only at intervals in her life. We do not care and cater for strangers as for our own children, for we are not capable of doing it. We do not reproach ourselves for the failure to compass the impossible any more than the paralytic feels remorse for having failed to answer the cry of the drowning that comes in at his open casement. It is no crime in us that we do not sweep across the Atlantic to help the sufferers as soon as the news of a big fire or flood or railway accident reaches us, but it might be a crime if the flying machine had been invented and we had one in the house. For an angel to refuse to outrun the light at his Maker's word to the uttermost bounds of the universe would be a crime worthy of chains and darkness, inasmuch as he has been gifted with the power of instantaneous and immeasurably extended flight. What is venial in me because of my incapacity might be a deep and ineffaceable transgres-

sion in God. God is bound to do His uttermost just as I am bound to do mine, and who can compute the interval that separates His uttermost from mine? He must use His infinite talents just as faithfully and earnestly as I my one. A supine and slipshod providence in a God of infinite attributes, the neglect to count hairs and care for sparrows, would be as profound a dishonour to Him as it would be to me if I were to refuse to hand a child from the window of a burning house.

God's infinitely discriminating wisdom makes no greater demand upon our faith than the truth of His boundless power. Perhaps it does not make so much, for our wisdom can grow out of all ratio to our physical power. Imagine what a man like Edison could do if you could give him a thousand years in which to think and verify and invent, and at the same time could keep him from resting content with his past triumphs. He could cover almost every exigency in our lives, however trifling, with the providence of his cunning mechanisms. When we go outside ourselves and the race we must leave all scales of personal measurement behind. What right has the man who has never been outside his native valley to say, "It is incredible London should have five millions of people in it"? It ought not to be more difficult for us to believe in the incalculable wisdom of God than it is to take the astronomer seriously when he tells us that the orb shining upon us is a million times greater in volume and attractive power than the planet on whose surface we tread. If we retain the term God in our vocabulary at all, we are bound to believe in His practical Almightiness, for signs of stupendous force meet us everywhere. The united power of the race is but like

the faint breath of a dying insect in comparison with some of the energies around us that shape and sustain worlds. Why cannot we believe in the hair-counting discriminations of Divine Providence as well as in the firmament-sustaining power? Let the ministry of angels come in to help the infirmity of your faith. If you cannot believe that God sees all and rules all, recognise that He can do this at least by the help of His unseen ministers.

The *unbeliever himself acknowledges a Providence that cares for trifles*—a Providence that builds up differentiated function and perfect type out of hair-breadth variations it has been guarding for ages, and accentuates at last into distinct families and kingdoms; but his providence has sealed eyelids, stony eyeballs, rigid hands, and is nameless, and yet by some happy chance it achieves these things. Ought that not to shame us to believe in an open-eyed and active-handed Providence named "God" that counts hairs and directs trifles, and never fails to keep watch over the elect in the process of building up the spiritual order, harmony, and perfection of the new universe? You have just as much right to go back to the crude idolatry of the savage, and to say that God has hands and feet and eyes of flesh, as to say that His providence must be judged by the analogies of our finite life.

But there is *selfishness* as well as incapacity at the root of our indifference to the details in the lives around us. Hence it is not only foolish but wicked to measure God's care for us by human standards. Half the limitation in our power comes from limitation of motive. We could care for others upon a much wider and more impressive scale if we wished. If

the power of exercising a more minute control over details contributing to our brother's welfare were offered to us, we should stand aghast at the thought of taking this new burden upon ourselves. As a matter of fact that power is offered. Forms of social beneficence are open to us at which we perhaps look askance by which we might multiply our personal power of helping and overwatching others. New methods of help and new expedients are generated by sympathy, but we make it our boast that we restrain any undue developments of sympathy, unless there be something concrete, practical, well-considered before us. Our power of helpfulness is always capable of expansion through an antecedent enlargement of soul. Our resources for guiding, aiding, comforting, overwatching others are withered and shrivelled by slothfulness and selfish preoccupation. In view of that fact, do not persist in measuring God's amazing providence by your own temper of evil and its enfeebling influence upon your faculties. God is not atrophied by selfishness. In His illimitable love He can care for each of us as though we were only sons on whom He was constrained to lavish all the pent-up eternity of His mighty heart, and can care for each speck in the moving cloud of birds more fondly than we care for the babes of our own fireside. His inscrutable compassions touch realms beyond our ken.

We smile when Buddhism tells us we must care just as much for pigs, reptiles, centipedes, mosquitoes, as for man, for all life is one. We might afford to do that if we had God's resourceful attributes for the endowment of our life, His long eternity for our working-day, and all the unknown opulence of His creation

for our stock-in-trade. But after all does not Buddhism rebuke our disbelief of the Providence that is over the sparrows, and much more significantly over redeemed man, for its disciple says, "If there be no god to take charge of the lower realms of suffering, sensitive life there ought to be, and by the fastings and prayers and merit-making actions of many ages, I will school myself into a god for the task." His vow ought to be a rebuke to the suspicion and unbelief that arise within us when we are told that God cares for the birds.

II. It is often intimated that our theories of Providence are frequently *discredited by the actual facts we see around us.* The government of the world often looks as though it were impersonal. It is said that there is nothing for it but to accept a view of natural law which makes it difficult for us to believe in the finely differentiated providence of which Jesus Christ speaks. The universe, we are tempted to say, is ruled by a necessity that takes no account of the individual. All facts point in that direction.

In travelling through the Black Forest I was surprised at the ingenuity with which the power of the mountain streams is utilised by the German manufacturer. Timber is divided into planks, and cut up into doors and window-frames and domestic furniture by the side of the rivers that have watered its growth. And as the plain widens there are spinning and weaving mills, and clock and watch factories, all the motive-power for which is supplied from turbines turned by the many-branching and rapid streams. A man with a smattering of abstract science, and ignorant of its applied principles, might argue that in the foaming torrent you had nothing more than the blind

rush of the water to the sea. It illustrated the law of gravitation, and nothing more. But if he could pass through the closed doors of the mills and factories he might see how this blind force was guided to profitable and well-considered ends. Millions of fine threads are brought under perfect and separate control, and made to work out fixed patterns in the looms. This blind force works dies that stamp out thousands of bits of metal, and turns lathes in which hair-fine wheels and movements are shaped and burnished that will control the life of towns, or guide the trackless pilgrimage of the mariner across the seething deeps. The force may be dark, inanimate, undiscerning, but a quick-eyed man takes hold of it and makes it do work of the finest possible discrimination. Man grafts the attributes of his personality on to the law and compels it to fulfil his counsel.

When we look abroad into the universe we seem to see the play of mere force, physical necessity, unvarying average, sun spots, weather cycles, processes of destruction that are just as recurrent and just as inevitable as the processes of life. Could we get into God's secret chambers we should see how He puts Himself into the blindest forces of the universe, and makes them move the fine threads of His counsel, and work out His deepest and most complex designs. Do not disbelieve the providence of fine discriminations, or you make God not a fellow-mortal even, but something in the very image of the unthinking brute. The man who disputes the fact of a Divine providence to all intents and purposes says to his Maker and King, "Thou art less than myself. Sit thou here under my footstool."

But it is argued that, *as a matter of fact, the*

government of the world is unworthy of a wise and gracious and capable Fatherhood. We are asked to contemplate the havoc wrought by flood and famine. We hold our harvest thanksgiving services, and poor farmers whose shocked or standing corn is under water are expected to come to church with light and loving hearts, and to join in a common tribute of praise for the ingathering of the fruits of the earth. We are reminded of the ever-recurring famines that seize upon the most densely peopled parts of the earth and asked if God accounts life sacred. The other day a coarse infidel paper was posted me in which I read, "God has again been riding upon the storm. News of a cyclone which has swept over Japan is just to hand. Thirty thousand people are said to have perished." We are reminded of wars the red trail of which is apt to cross again and again the fairest lands upon which the sun looks, and asked if God thinks more of life than a blood-drunk Cæsar. The industrial side of modern life is scarcely more pleasing to contemplate than its military organisation and development. Europe is an armed camp in the commercial sense, and that is true of the new world as well as the old. On every exchange and in every market-place men are trying to lay siege to each other's wealth, to annex, to make corners, to monopolise, to glut themselves and their children with needless luxuries at the expense of starving other people's children to death. And God sits smiling in the heavens and permits all this. We are told it is the established order, and we must not challenge or overthrow it. And He permits acts of carelessness that are just as fatal to human life and happiness as crimes multiplied a thousandfold. A temperate, law-

abiding, and industrious people are swept in an hour out of their prosperous valley into nameless graves. A panic occurs at a place of entertainment, and the massacre of the innocents horrifies the land. A gay procession of Sunday-school children are crushed in a railway accident like midges between the palms of a giant, and jubilation is changed to terror and death. An explosion occurs in a fiery pit, and fifty per cent. of the women in a mining hamlet have to put on mourning. Disasters have a tendency to increase as the world civilises itself, and men gather together for the inspiration of numbers. Nature seems to think no more of life than a boy with a catapult of the window glass in a deserted house. God must surely have forgotten human lives in His care for hairs. We are tempted to say, Let Him leave the sparrows to shift for themselves and care a little for His children. He seems to think of millions of lives as lightly as we think of hairs.

It is idle for us to judge God in these things or pass shallow strictures upon His government *unless we can see to the far-off end of His plans.* We need to solve the riddle of the invisible future before we can begin to have the shadow of a right to pronounce upon these questions. But the dawn of a benign interpretation begins to flush in some of the darkest economies of His providence. In the tragedies of drought and flood and dearth we seem to hear the stern voice of Heaven saying to the tumultuous and dissentient nations, "Be at peace, for ye are brethren." These recurring perils save us from the temptation to selfish insularity, and make governments feel more deeply that it is their interest as well as their duty to draw close as may be the bonds of international amity.

Who knows but by the drastic *régime* of dearth and famine God may be preparing the providential antidote to the yet greater calamity of war? He blights a few sheaves in our harvest fields, for in the last retrospect it will seem no more than that, and sows in our desolated furrows the seeds of a blessed and world-wide brotherhood that shall be the glory of the golden age yet to be. In the disasters that come upon communities through neglect or inadvertence God seems to speak to the wit of the human brain and summon it to finer exploits of inventive skill, and the last civilisation may be a plant of renown that has been watered by the blood of nameless and unwitting martyrs and the tears of their desolate children.

But how about the poor victims of disaster themselves? Well, if they are God's servants they will be compensated for unconscious sacrifice, and if they are not God's servants they are not likely to be any worse off for a death that is tragic rather than commonplace in its type. The nearer as well as the more remote issues are under providential regulation. These things, however, belong to the secret counsels of God's judgment. The cutting off of a life cannot be understood from the earthward aspect of the operation any more than the high destiny of a gathered fruit or flower can be augured by counting the snapped fibres on the bleeding stalk that has been left behind. The flower may nestle in the bosom of a royal bride, and the fruit may have gone to heal the disease of a nation. The tears of a torn and breaking heart, the grave-side groans, Rachel's pitiful incoherencies, the dismay and cruel vacancy in the home, are no clues by which to interpret the enigma.

We can surely divine that it is no part of God's plan to keep men and women in a prosperous life of the senses for ever and a day. It is not His design to nurse His children into feeding and toiling organisms only, whose culminating recompense is a bit of warm sunshine. Really some people might think that God ought to feed and fatten and pamper us into a state of chronic intellectual and spiritual disease. We cannot gauge God's providence over the little things of life by His apparent indifference to the time and circumstance under which the stream of breath in a man ceases. It is His hand which controls that breath, and His hand never forgets its cunning.

Much of our terror at death is due to ignorance of what death is, and to the assumption that it can come to any one of us as mere fate. To God and to us death must seem very different things. We are held in its chains, or at least seem to be. He holds death in chains, and never lets the key of the grim monster's fetters pass for a moment out of His possession. We seem so powerless in its presence. He uses it as a foiled and a blinded adversary subdued to the will of the palace and the throne. Death is terrible only to the man of unwashed guilt and reproachful conscience, and if it comes to him clad in light like an angel, soft-voiced as the turtle-dove, cozening with captivating smiles, his lot will be no lighter than if it comes as a king of terrors with a scythe. Our sin, and the ignorance which is the product of sin, give death its venom and arm it with its fangs.

It is said that the Ainos of Japan have a dread of removing their clothes. It is an immemorial super-

stition with them. A woman of this primitive race, who was persuaded by a European lady to take a bath, took it with all her finery and war-paint on, and was horrified at the thought of undressing for the purpose.

If we are Christ's disciples our dread of death is as gross a superstition as that of the aborigines of Japan. Who knows but that the stripping off of the flesh we so much dread may prove a delicious lustration, and the casting aside of this vestiture of matter may be a baptism into unexpected strength and beatitude?

These words are intended to direct our thought to the *fine, painstaking equities* of God's judgment. It will be remembered that they occur in Matthew in immediate connection with the statement that the apostles would be called to stand before kings and rulers. Every hair was numbered. God knew its place, and could compute the wrong of which it might be subject and witness. A thousand times over would God vindicate James against Herod who slew him with the sword. No act of unholy violence should pass unnoticed. He knows the secret slander that whitens a single hair on the head of His meanest servant. He knows the undefined wrongs of which we haply are no more conscious than of the falling of a hair. His judgment will touch realms of action of which we have very little conception. The righteous man shall be vindicated in the smallest things. Wrongs there may be that are slight as the falling of a hair. We should think a man crazy if he were to set himself to formulate them and bring them into court. God's judgment will touch wrongs as little as that. For every righteous sufferer there will be unstinted indemnity. God will vindicate him

to the very last hem and fringe and detail, vindicate him by all that he brings upon his oppressors—better still, vindicate him by the recovery of the oppressor to conscience and righteousness and humanity, and we can have no higher or more glorious vindication than that. No unrighteousness is a trifle. We sometimes say disapprovingly that a man is morbidly sensitive, thin-skinned to the point of monomania, a stickler for equity in grains and scruples. If that arises from a love of right, and not from a morbid sense of self-importance, such a man is much nearer God and God's conceptions than his less scrupulous fellows. God, who judges the adversaries of His people, the men who obstruct and disparage His work, coarse, ignorant, narrow worldlings, or self-assuming pietists for the matter of that, who offend His little ones, takes every hair into His reckoning. In the great summing-up there will be no neglected fractions.

These words, implying as they do that God's providence takes hold of everything between death, the profoundest solemnity in our earthly lives on the one hand, and trifles like the falling of a hair on the other, should convince us that the *time and circumstance of every disciple's death are wisely chosen*, and that the issue will prove a vast beatitude. We stand aghast at the fact that sudden and perhaps violent death comes to many of whose religious condition we have very scanty knowledge, and who have never confided to those nearest to them the significant secret of the soul. We assume, and especially in the cases of our young and immature friends, that a blind destiny has swept away as with a whirlwind those who might have been better prepared to face eternal realities had not their opportunities been so ruthlessly cut short.

We assume, even of the godly man, that he might have been more triumphantly equipped for his transition if he could have known that it was so close at hand. The temptation comes to us to think that if our views of a rigid earthly probation are correct, it is possible unexpected disaster may come to imperfectly prepared souls. To the winds with such fears. The Judge of the returning spirit and the Giver of the last breath are not two independent potentates who act in separate grooves without mutual counsel and co-operation, but one and the same. God never takes away to doom a soul that is salvable, any more than the sagacious husbandman prematurely plucks fruit of promise. The great God Himself cannot achieve the moral impossibility of gathering grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, but grape and fig alike may mellow and sweeten after they have passed beyond our ken. We cannot always assure ourselves of the condition of those whom death mows down, but God may sometimes see both germinal good that will meeten for recompense, and germinal evil that fits for doom, where such things elude our notice. It is a thought that will relieve the harsher applications of the doctrine of retribution, that if God cares for a hair the child's hand can pluck, and with which the chance wind can sport, He will not neglect the infinite and eternal promise in any life about us.

If God's care is about the sinking life as well as about the withering hair of the disciple, *the one event shall be as harmless as the other.* Do not distress yourself about what is to come. Death can take no more from us than from our Lord. After the sacrifice had been offered all its materials were inviolably sacred. A strong and vigilant Providence was about the

descent from the cross and the entombment. "A bone of Him shall not be broken." Never think of the death of the saint as a give-and-take transaction, for the grim phantom is unequal to the task of subtracting the most trivial quality from the life. "Not a hair of your head shall be destroyed." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Not only does He make their bed in their affliction, but they die at last upheld in the Everlasting Arms, and with every vagrant hair smoothed into order by the touch of God.

Belief in a Providence that is informed by incalculably minute sympathies is *necessary to our habitual communion with God.* Without this, worship if it do not die out altogether, will sink into a round of dreary and insipid ritual. Under the stimulus of this faith it becomes a glorious and a soul-exalting friendship. If God cannot or will not care for little things, we have no encouragement to come to His feet and pour out our tale before Him. We might as well beseech gorgons and supplicate minotaurs.

This belief ought to give *calmness in our work and authority to the message* we are sent to deliver. Every part of the elect life is under a sacred ordination, and God watches over all the things that concern us as we do His will. We often lack a due sense of our vocation because our belief in a guiding Providence is feeble. These words are addressed to the twelve as they are about to venture forth upon their new destiny, and the words are the permanent inheritance of the sincere and active discipleship in all ages. A man is nowhere so safe as in the path of Christian service, and in the very middle of that path. Where God calls there will be no peril or pitfall. "He shall

give His angels charge." The Psalm is Messianic, but its promises are ours who are joined to the Lord in the fellowship of faith and service. It is impossible to say what those forfeit who disesteem that fellowship and refuse that service. "Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants: and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate."

VI.

THE DIVINE JEALOUSY.

"For the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."—EXOD. xxxiv. 14.

THE wisdom and courage of the words in which the earlier revelations of God were presented to the Jewish race, can scarcely fail to awaken amazement and admiration within us, if we give a moment's reflection to the subject. There was no nervous dread of paradox or contradiction in the inspired speaker, no dainty hesitation at painting the character of God in colours which the common eye could read, no weak, faltering fastidiousness at ascribing to Jehovah passions commonly manifested amongst men in gross, imperfect, reprehensible forms.

The Mosaic revelation set out with recognising the pure spirituality of God. There would have been no meaning in the inhibition of all attempts to represent Jehovah by outward form or image apart from the underlying doctrine of God's pure spirituality. And yet from Moses down through the prophets the Old Testament boldly speaks of the life, thought, movement of God under precisely the same phraseology as was employed to describe the life, thought, and ordinary movement of man.

And to a practical mind with practical aims to compass, no other method was possible. If the pure spirituality of God had been taught, and an attempt had at the same time been made to coin a set of phrases to describe the things of God more abstruse and ethereal than those commonly used to describe the things of a man, the religion founded by Moses would have reached its culmination in a vague, colourless, impotent Pantheism, woefully void of all sharp, ethical teaching and obligation.

A school of philosophy has arisen within recent years which insists that God is neither personal nor impersonal, but suprapersonal. In some way inconceivable to human thought His being transcends personality. Now it would be impossible to graft moral law, with all its soul-vivifying sanctions, upon a system of that sort. We may make God a factor with which it is not worth our while to reckon, either by materialising His attributes or by diluting Him into what is so remote from all human experience as to be unthinkable.

Speculative mathematicians tell us they can conceive it quite possible space may have a fourth dimension. A practical contractor would hesitate a long time before engaging to build a bridge or lighthouse the plans and specifications for which assumed a fourth dimension in space. No working system of either morals or theology can be built upon the being and character of a God of whom it is postulated that He is suprapersonal. Passion is the sap of life in its individual, social, and national developments and manifestations. There can be no growth or movement without it. All activity either has our own passion as its mainspring, or is a response to the

passion of another. Passion is indispensable to every moral and religious movement that has human nature for its sphere and its subject—passion in me and passion in God if He is to make me respond to His character and will.

It was wisdom of incontestable divineness in Moses which led him, after asserting the pure spirituality of God, to go on and describe the things of God in precisely the same terms which had been used to describe the sentiments, motive-principles, and common activities of human life. There was a sublime fearlessness in the process by which, at the imminent risk of a paradox, he saved theology for the entire race of man, and along with theology the old moral law with all the solemnities and obligations it comprehended.

And not only does Moses seize upon the nobler, but also upon the less noble, human passions, to accentuate his representations of the Divine character. No human form or likeness must be made to appeal to the imagination or the senses, and yet God is not less truly the subject of wrath than a wronged, insulted, or dishonoured man. Wrath may be known almost entirely in association with human error, weakness, defective self-control. The natures most susceptible to it may be proportionately proud, selfish, exacting, and perhaps even the long scroll of human history may offer no spotlessly holy embodiment of it. Yet the word shall be fearlessly used. Pestilence, fly and locust and scorpion swarms, deadly defeat in the day of battle, are sure and certain signs that God frowns. Incapable of wrath, He would be equally incapable of complacency and approval, and men must needs think of Him as a giant automaton

holding the helpless worlds in a clutch of steel. A right hand implies a left, and there can be no faculty for cherishing feelings of favour unless there be the faculty also for cherishing feelings of disfavour.

And then we come to a word that has perhaps more uniformly evil and unholy associations than even the word wrath—JEALOUSY. It links itself not infrequently with groundless suspicion, with the lust of dominion, with malignant ill-will, even with brutal murder. Jealousy is much oftener a flagrant vice than a virtue. Types of the passion free from the faintest adulteration of frailty and wrong may be rare, if not altogether unknown, and yet there must be a sphere in which the types and examples of the passion are characterised by positive and essential rightfulness, and the word shall therefore be fearlessly uttered. One who upon sufficient occasion cannot be jealous cannot truly and heartily love. Jealousy is love on its darkened and shadowed and suffering underside. In a fallen and fallible universe that eclipse may project itself upon the surface of the purest and most radiant love. God is not the ghost of an iceberg philosophy compiled out of frozen abstractions. He whose name is Love is likewise called "Jealous." He will brook no rivalry. Let a contending claim start up within the heart, let an alien sovereignty usurp the rule of the life, and His wrath will burn like fire. A bold and fearless form of speech this—a form that might well seem to challenge criticism!

And yet does not the historical issue of the teaching fully justify the language employed? It was this thought, that God was jealous, and would brook no contending claim, that helped to make every member

of the Jewish race at last a hater of idols. You may find a dozen instances in which a so-called Christian community has apostatised into idolatry to one in which a Jewish community has apostatised. And the difference is explained to some extent by the place given in the thought of the different communities to the conception of our text. The idea of the jealousy of Jehovah has fixed itself ineradicably into the heart of the chosen people, and for five-and-twenty centuries has made that people almost to a man the worshippers of one Eternal Spirit. It was this thought which inspired the zeal of Phinehas against graven images, which animated the successive campaigns against the Canaanites, which made Gideon the redoubtable ironside and iconoclast he proved himself, which imbued Samuel with inflexible courage and faithfulness. It was this thought which suggested the right interpretation of the Divine judgments that came swooping down upon the people when they had lapsed for a time into idolatry, "Why doth thy jealousy burn like fire?"

For two millenniums and a half it has kept an undivided race in all social and political conditions and vicissitudes, consistently and passionately devoted to a stern faith in one God. It is a wonderful thought that has wrought all this, and we must not lightly condemn it as one of the crudities of Jewish theology. In fact, we have not outstepped the need for this severe fact. It ought to spur every one of us in our crusade against the lingering idolatries of the world. We have grown so artistic that we are ready to condone some forms of idolatry for the sake of their picturesqueness. The Greek Pantheon is the school in which we educate our sense of beauty. In the

administration of our vast Indian Empire it has seemed fit to deal tenderly with the prejudices of native races, and tolerate many forms of idolatry. That can scarcely be wicked in the worst sense of the term which our rulers have found necessary to tolerate from motives of political expediency. And through our observation in other lands, or by reading books of travel, we have discovered the virtuous heathen. We have found that the idolater sometimes is a patriot, a moralist, a hero, and we are apt to ascribe his excellencies to the false and idolatrous system in which he has been trained, rather than to the Spirit of Light which makes its shrine in the breast of every man. However much may be said in extenuation of many an individual who worships an image, nothing can be said in favour even of the most refined and artistic systems of idolatry. God is still jealous of every rival, captivating or reputable though he may be made to appear, and the world will never be rid of its God-provoking idolatries till we give this fierce truth the same place in our thought that it had in Jewish.

And more than that, this idea has to be carried into purely spiritual regions, and be made to purge our hearts, after the same clean and wholesale fashion, from the insidious idolatries of the intellect and the will. The time will come when all within us that savours of Egypt and Babylon shall have perished, and every specious imagination of the heart shall have withered as completely before this fiery truth as the worship of idols fashioned by man's hands.

Is there an ideal jealousy which is free from the least taint of imperfection, impetuosity, blind, harsh unloveliness? Is jealousy primarily a vice masking

as a much-suffering virtue, or is it a virtue that has caught many of the basenesses of a vice? May we ascribe jealousy to the holy and glorious God without reflecting the least stain of dishonour upon His nature?

Our literature, like that of all nations, indeed, abounds in pictures of this consuming passion. I am not sure that we can turn to a single delineation in which it is free from every trace of intellectual and moral alloy. Perhaps the most familiar and impressive delineation of the passion is that presented by Shakespeare in his great masterpiece, "Othello the Moor." If you recall the chief outlines of the tragedy you will have a concrete illustration before you from which to start in studying the subject of the Divine jealousy.

Into the mind of the bluff, unsophisticated Moor, who is the chief figure in the drama, the wily Iago begins to inject cruel doubts about the fidelity of Desdemona. Desdemona's child-like kindness in interceding for Cassio, after he has been degraded for a street-brawl, is turned against her, and made an occasion for reproach and suspicion. And then there comes the episode of the Egyptian handkerchief which has been given by Othello as a love-token to Desdemona. The arch-plotter contrives that the handkerchief which has been inadvertently left in the room shall be seen in the hand of Cassio. Cassio is led to speak words which to Othello's suspicious nature, as he overhears them, seem to reflect upon the integrity of his blameless wife, fitting in as they do with the other incidents. The terrible fire has begun to work within the brain of the swart warrior, and his conclusions are swiftly and irreversibly

reached. And then the great dramatist paints for us the chamber-scene—a picture of unparalleled pathos. Desdemona protests her innocence, and pleads piteously for life; but Othello is inexorable, and with his own hands strangles this chaste and blameless woman, pure in body and in mind as far-away snows that the sunbeam only can kiss.

"Like the base Indian," he—

> "Threw away a pearl
> Richer than all his tribe."

I suppose we are not expected to feel any very large amount of sympathy with this half-heathen fool, in spite of the fact that he was overpowered by remorse at his mistake, and makes the expiation of suicide. The jealousy in him rested upon a miserable blunder, and the blunder in this case was worse than a crime. He had a frank, unsophisticated nature, and was ignorant of the plots and intrigues of Venetian life, and so far we may pity him. But the jealousy of which he was at once subject and victim arose from the unregulated impulsiveness of a crude, heathen nature. We feel not a little indignant and righteous scorn for the man, because he would neither reason himself nor hear reason from the lips of his martyr-bride.

Our condemnation of jealousy is not infrequently *condemnation of the ignorance and infatuation with which it is mixed.* Jealousy must always rank with the vices rather than virtues when, like that of Othello, it is blind—blind with the guilty blindness that will not consent to see. In not a few of the outbreaks of this temper that force themselves upon our view, jealousy is totally divorced from reason.

It is a freak of the imagination. It vaults wildly to its conclusions, and disdains the slow and safe steps of conclusive argument.

> "Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmation strong
> As proof of Holy Writ."

No passion that rests upon a basis of flimsy and slender suspicion can ever justify itself to the conscience. In nine cases out of ten to cherish this passion is a shameful thing, not so much because no occasion ever can arise to warrant it, but because the full logical proof of the justifying occasion is wanting, and premature jealousy may have been fanned by idle, designing, malignant natures. We are so pitifully ignorant and fallible, and the passion is so apt to swamp the judgment, that it is often wicked and dangerous to allow a single spark of jealousy to smoulder within us. Its rightfulness and legitimacy are limited by the imperfection of knowledge.

Our condemnation of jealousy is very often *condemnation of the despotic temper*, in which it has its root. We class it with the vices rather than the virtues, because in many cases it is not love seeking the just return of love. How often is it thinly disguised ambition, aggressive and overbearing egotism! I have no doubt Shakespeare meant us to recognise an element of this sort in the jealousy of Othello. It was not only his misfortune to have been trained in a faith in which woman was held as a mere puppet, but he was a soldier, and it was a part of his professional life to command. He was intoxicated by the sense of authority. The imaginary crime in Desdemona was riot against his authority, and he was

set upon dealing with it as promptly and as ruthlessly as he would have dealt with mutiny in his camp. Some men must satisfy the sense of authority that is in them by extorting unlimited homage from those about them. Their love is but the specious disguise assumed by their lust of power, and their jealousy is the secondary symptom of that lust. There are men who marry not for the high harmony that comes from the blending of mind with kindred mind, but because they want to rule. Their jealousy is the last bitter fruit of morbid egotism. If such creatures happen to be in office they cling to it, not so much because of the power it gives them of ministering to the community, but because of flatteries and obeisances, which are the recognised perquisites of such petty kingships. They resent rivalry because that seems to divide the tribute they take from their fellows. We need to put the bit and check-rein upon every form of jealousy, for very often that temper is but the outworking of overweening egotism and the selfish instinct for power.

Our condemnation of jealousy, again, is sometimes *the condemnation of moral unfitness to win and to retain* the love that has been vainly sought or miserably abused. The temper is often a vice, because the chilled affection that has provoked it is the just retribution of neglect, ungraciousness, intemperance of disposition and behaviour. It is not long since the newspapers told us of a man who had driven his wife away by his violent behaviour, and then stabbed her because she was seen speaking in the street to a rival. How often is jealousy the frantic endeavour made by this blind nature of ours to command a devotion that has never been justly earned, or that

has been forfeited by reiterated misdeed. He who does not deserve to be loved and honoured is often more sensitively jealous than his fellows. His jealousy is but the cloak assumed by a vague condemnation and remorse that possess his soul. We are bound to keep ourselves well in hand when the spirit of jealousy rises up within us, because the chilled love that tempts and provokes it may be a recoil from more or less conscious faults of our own.

Our condemnation of jealousy is often a *condemnation of the merciless and savage forms* in which it expresses itself. We class it with the vices rather than with the virtues, because when the passion is once encouraged it tends to become a masterful impulse akin to homicidal madness. Perhaps Othello's sensibilities had been already hardened by the scenes of blood in which he has lived, but in the last act of his life he reaches a pitch of obdurate cruelty rarely equalled on the inhuman battle-fields of the middle ages. Solomon says that "jealousy is cruel as the grave," and no more fitting inscription could have been put upon the tombstone of this misguided Moor. His soul was closed by high walls of iron and brass to the tenderest and most reasonable pleading. You might as well argue with an active volcano as argue with this man when the tides of awful fire were coursing through his veins. His very frame was shaken into helpless and hopeless paroxysm by the deadly passion. He became possessed. Of all our moods jealousy is the most blind and deaf and unfetterable in its dreadful power, utterly fatal to self-rule. We associate the name with violence, with the wreck of homes, with a tiger-thirst for blood raging in those who once lived together in affection, with all that is

sickly in tragedy and ghastly in crime. It is a more frequent motive for murder than even covetousness and common revenge. There is an unknown power of violence in it, and when it once begins to work within the heart it behoves men to put the heaviest restraint upon its movement. You look upon the passion, and can more readily think of it as a jet of fierce flame that has leapt up out of hell than as a calm, pure altar-coal that has come down from God in heaven.

Now strip away all these accidents, and is there no core of insistent and unchanging rightness at the centre of this passion? Is there no root-principle in it that the last analysis will not volatilise or annihilate?

The jealousy that may be a crime when nursed in ignorance becomes a spotless virtue when it awakens in a nature whose knowledge is without limit. It would be a shame not to be sensible of the feeling when there is a complete and conclusive proof of offence against covenant moralities. Forget the human associations of the word and think of this: God cannot err or misconceive, nor does He need to rest His judgment upon a witness that may mislead or betray. He is not obliged to fit together perplexing fragments of circumstantial evidence that may perhaps lend themselves to more combinations than one. He goes into the darkest mazes of the heart, and reads with an unerring glance of flame every letter of its subtle secrets. All his jealousies rest upon the bed-rock of incontestable proof. With Him jealousy is not a wild ferment of the imagination, but the passion of His heart-searching Omniscience. In such a nature jealousy does not need to be held in

check and qualified. God may be more stupendously jealous than man can ever suffer himself, or indeed than he has the power to be, without bringing the least shadow of dishonour upon his glory.

God's jealousy needs no checks or restraints or safeguards, because it can never arise from despotic moods or the base lust of power. It is true He grips His sceptre more tenaciously than earthly monarch maddest for dominion, but He loves power for its own sake less than the meekest of meek children with the mere instinct of tendrils. He holds immovably to His supremacy through all ages, because it is best that He should rule, and He alone. There is no lust of authority for its own sake that can taint His own holy jealousy and make it into a blemish. Strip away the despotic temper that sometimes spurs to jealousy, and have you extirpated the living and deathless instinct that is beneath it?

God does not need to limit the manifestations of His jealousy by the thought which should sometimes restrain our human jealousies—that the title to the gratitude of those who are cold to us is more or less defective and impeachable. He may be rightly moved by an awful measure of this passion, because He does not need to discount it by any remembrance of shortcoming towards us. His dealings with us have ever been equitable, generous, patient beyond all human parallels, an ever-running stream of compassions. By hourly acts of providence dating further back than the cradle, by forbearance, by forgiveness, by unnumbered economies of indulgent favour, by temporal and spiritual redemptions of unequalled grandeur, He has been asserting His silent claim to our love and faithfulness. There is no shadow of a momentary

lapse in God to excuse our alienations, or to make Him condone our foolishnesses and apostasies: nothing in the past to disqualify Him from cherishing this passion to the full when occasion arises.

And He of all beings need not restrain jealousy, lest it should become an unbridled frenzy. In all the turmoils and anarchies of the ages He has restrained His wrath, and in presence of the foulest wrongs has maintained the silence of a long-suffering love. Dissociate the passion from its spasms of insane violence, and is there no core of rational reality left behind in it? Take the cruelty and the recklessness from this sad temper of mind and transplant it into a nature that is calm with the crystalline tranquillity of all-wise reason and eternal foresight, and the sense of infinite power and a resolute, unfluctuating love over which no involuntary eclipse can come, and will not this passion present itself under such conditions as faultlessly holy? It may have full and infinitely desolating play. Without challenging criticism it may become indescribably intense, more overwhelming than its most tragic human forms.

The flaws in our current human jealousies notwithstanding, *may not the very highest moral and spiritual forces go to inform and energise this sentiment?* I said just now that the heart which upon just and righteous occasion was incapable of jealousy, was likewise incapable of love. Love has rights it can never renounce without proving false to its own deepest qualities. The king, if he be a sincere and unselfish lover and servant of his people, and not a mere hunter after pomp and gaiety at the public cost, will be rightly jealous of the rise of any competing authority in the territories over which he rules. The

father may be rightly stirred by this same passion if he finds his son contented only when under strange roofs and taking counsel of chance acquaintances and according them his best homage and affection. Unless his natural instincts have become seared no one loves as does he, and it is love which gives the right to companionship, and the authority to direct. The husband may rightly be jealous if he sees another preferred to himself, and the man who connives at infidelity and condones it, is described by an old English epithet that has become too foully opprobrious for modern use. Human love, at least, cannot burn for ever without the response of a kindred flame. Where it has given all it must receive. No rivalry will be brooked where our highest devotion goes forth and has been accepted.

And if no love can compare with God's, no right can rival the right that is inherent in the foundation qualities of that love. Who cherishes concerning us purposes as high and far-reaching as He? Who can shape our course for us with such unerring discernment, if we will only entrust our destinies into His hand? Who has already done for us, is still doing in the passing hour, and will continue to do, an appreciable fraction of that which He does? What presence can carry with it the same power of ennoblement as His? If jealousy ever were right and holy as between two human beings linked by the most sacred ties, it is a hundredfold more so in God. If God could not feel the sharpest jealousy when in our idolatrous infatuation we prefer others to Himself, He would be quite unworthy our worship and service and song.

All *humane and civilised governments* which account

themselves responsible for the well-being of the people committed to their care are characterised by this temper of jealousy, and the strength of the temper is a test of their very right to exist. In such cases the passion is emphatically a virtue. Do you think the dock and harbour authorities of a great seaport would let you take a steamer down the river and out to sea unless you had the necessary qualifications? Whatever your social and political influence, do you think that the Admiralty would let you navigate a troopship with five hundred souls on board through the reefs of the Red Sea unless you had a master's certificate? Where life and property depend upon well-attested technical knowledge, all humane governments are rightly jealous of unskilled interference, and the Government that is quite indifferent is still in a condition of barbarism. Do you think any rustic woodman or carpenter would be allowed to pass into your infirmary and try his hand at an amputation or trepanning or lithotomy? Set up as a doctor without passing the necessary examinations, and see how long the Government will tolerate your intrusion in a sphere that is not yours. It is jealous of all unauthorised rivalry of this sort, not because some motive of self-respect impels it to put its own stamp and sign-manual upon knowledge, but because it cares for the lives of the people, and it must have certified competence when grave diseases are to be driven back and potent drugs administered. Its jealousy, like that of the great God, is humane, pitiful, unselfish in its basis. The sacred monkeys in one of the cities of India were becoming such a pest to the inhabitants that it was necessary to transport some of the ring-leaders. They were put into a luggage-van and

carried away to a thinly-settled district in Central India where several trunk railways met, but when they were turned loose they found their way into the signal cabins and other places, and began pulling the levers and tampering with the signals and changing the points. Of course the railway officials were jealous of the intrusion. Jealousy of unskilled interposition when so much is at stake is honourable and praiseworthy. The man not jealous would have the spirit of a mere devil within him. All the love in God's heart goes into this holy passion of jealousy. That love is its very sap and life-blood, and when His jealousy is no more, the very roots of His love to the universe will have withered away. Divine jealousy stands shoulder to shoulder with the other attributes of God in moral glory and perfection.

In the darkness of a blustering winter's night I was once coming down the rapids of a Chinese river. There were several scores of market people in the same boat returning to their homes. The boatmen, who made the journey ten or a dozen times a month, were versed in the swish of every eddy and the roar of every separate whirlpool, the boom of the current on each obstructing rock, and the hurly-burly of the waters as they spread themselves out over the broad gravel beds, and were at home on almost every square inch of the water-way. Sometimes we came down full swing between chasms of rock where we had not more than half a foot of margin. A mistaken tug at the rudder, too energetic a use of the oar on the wrong side at the wrong moment, failure to calculate the margin of the water-way to a shade, and we should have been dashed to bits on the rocks. Now if I, a stranger, had laid a hand upon the rudder, or had

snatched an oar from one of the boatmen, and had begun to make proof of a skill I had cultivated on English rivers, the boatmen would have been profoundly jealous of my intervention. And rightly so for they possessed a special knowledge in which I was wanting. Their common humanity, a sense of their responsibility for the souls on board, the dread of a more formidable form of trial for manslaughter than that of European courts, compelled them to a temper of keen and passionate jealousy, and the temper did them all honour.

The jealousy exercised in the interests of others must be holy and beneficent. God will brook no intrusion into His work, no division of His authority, no departure from His laws. He alone can guide us through the rocks and whirlpools, and bring us to our far-off goal. That He should be supreme is the very salvation of the universe.

Now let us face the question: if jealousy has this high and holy basis, and if God's jealousy does not need to be held in check because of the imperfection of knowledge, the risk of mistake, or the fear lest the passion once kindled should hurry into inordinate and unconsidered excess, is not the Divine type of the passion likely to be more terribly intense and overwhelming than any of the human types we find around us? It springs from the grief and indignation of a love deeper, more generous, more concentrated than all finite love, and must necessarily partake of the transcendent qualities of the love in which it has its root and beginning; and it is reinforced moreover by God's sense of responsibility for the immortal welfare of beings who are ever being plied with the temptation to prefer others to Himself, the

only true source of good. With Him it is no passion fanned into fury by the sinister whisperings of others; it rests on absolute knowledge, and burns like flame in the dry, crisp air. God gives incalculably more love than others, and He is moved with a deeper indignation when you suffer a rival to reign in His place.

Do not suppose that this declaration that "God's name is Jealous" belongs only to the stern aspects of the Old Testament revelation, and that it has no concern for you to-day. Mark how this feature reappears in the character and teaching of Jesus Christ, who is the image of the Father's person and glory. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." "He that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be My disciple." That is the reasonable claim of a love that is infinite, and it would be madness in a love less than infinite. Christ would not suffer the rivalry of those who had the highest human claim upon the affection and service of His disciples. All the tender and generous acts for which the names of father and mother, brother and sister stand, are as grains of dust in presence of His ineffable love, and the claims to which they give rise cannot measure themselves against the claim of Him who has loved us from everlasting, and dies to bring about our regeneration to life and blessedness. The holy jealousy of Christ's life is as true a hint of the surpassing qualities of His love as the vicariousness of His bitter death. This Divine jealousy came to Him with His eternal generation, and exemplifies His Sonship no less than signs and wonders from the Father.

St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians of the jealousy he feels for them as "the jealousy of God," and we

need to judge ourselves in the same spirit. Let each ask himself, Is there nothing in my life to grieve and anger the Most High? Do I not listen to other voices of counsel and direction when I ought to be listening only to the solemn and imperative voice from above? Are there not places that have a stronger fascination for me than God's house? If God were supreme with me would not the hours spent before Him seem all too short? If I loved Him with all my heart according to His commandment should I not find more refreshment in His presence than with the gayest-hearted and most kindly friends, and be found coming forth from His courts with a brighter face than from the congenial circles in which talk and kindly laughter have made me forget my cares? Is my delight in God's work absorbing, or do I look upon it as irksomeness? Is it the chief end of my life to promote the two things which are really one—His glory and the good of men? Is God's Word more potent in its charm for me than all other literature? If the book that teaches me more of God than other books is not the first in my preferences, that is the sign God Himself is not enthroned in my most perfect love. Is not this ignoble "If" itself the rival which disputes the sovereignty with Him?

God does not need symptoms to help Him to a diagnosis of our condition, for He goes in person into the heart to note its secrets; but these symptoms may be a sign to ourselves that God is not duly loved, and that we provoke Him to daily jealousy. He will not accept from us the same measure of trust only that we give to the creature, and we perhaps offer Him a less hearty trust even than that. He will not accept the same tribute of love we offer to those

nearest to us, and we perhaps insult Him by bringing something less. "The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." He will put disappointment into your life, and the cruel gap into your relationships, and vexing frustrations into your plans, and the apples of Sodom into your parched lips, if you suffer a rival to compete with Him in your hearts; and the rival will inevitably be there if your love is less than a passion, and your service short of an entire devotion.

VII.

THE CALL TO REVERENCE.

"Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."—EXOD. iii. 5.

THESE words are a call to reverence. The God who, forty years later, from the fiery crest of Sinai, gives the commandments which sum up man's duty to God and his neighbour, here promulgates from the flaming bush at Horeb that law of reverence which is the very germ of all worship and righteousness.

The particular form by which reverence expresses itself may be a matter of custom and changing convention. Throughout the greater part of the Orient the removal of the sandals is the common sign of respect. The European traveller has to conform to this practice to-day before he can enter the sacred mosques at Cairo, or Delhi, or Constantinople. Eastern habits of life may possibly explain the origin of this particular form of respect. Was it that the slave in waiting upon the master did it with girt loins and unshod feet that this came to be looked upon as an appropriate expression of humility? Or was it that in olden times, as now, the floors of Eastern tents were spread with mats and carpets and skins, and that the visitor was expected to remove his mud-

splashed or dust-choked sandals before putting foot on these cherished possessions? The custom exists as far east as Japan. In the shops and houses of that country a low daïs or platform is raised a few inches above the level of the floor, and covered with matting of dainty fineness, and he would be thought vulgar and undiscerning indeed who should neglect to remove shoes or clogs before stepping on to this platform. Such was the custom in ancient China; but with a change in the structure of the houses the custom altered, and the removal of the shoes is no longer required as an act of courtesy.

To the conventional form of reverence demanded from him Moses added a gesture of adoring homage that was purely spontaneous, but a gesture that he might have learned from the angels, had he been schooled in heaven. "He hid his face, for he feared to look upon God." A sudden glimpse into the meaning of the burning bush came to him—a glimpse some of our best trusted commentators have not yet attained. He knew how sacred was the mystery before which he stood.

The scene in which this strange sight bursts upon the view of Moses is not difficult to picture. For some days past he has been leading his flock by easy marches westward, and has at last reached the lower slopes of Horeb. He has probably just pitched his tent at the close of a day's journey, and, as the night deepens around him, and the stars glitter into view, he sees on a distant spur or slope of the mountain one of the sparsely scattered acacia shrubs wrapped about with strange streamers of flame. In the black cone of shadow cast by Horeb, it glows at last with a light surpassing that of moon or star. He has doubt-

less seen hill-sides ablaze before. It is a sight familiar to most travellers in the East. In the autumn months the scrub of the foot-hills is often fired by the inhabitants to fertilise the soil, or to destroy the cover in which wild beasts might possibly harbour. Sometimes a stray spark, dropped into the dry, coarse autumn or winter grass, will start these fires that burn for days. In night journeyings in Eastern countries I have many a time watched the fire slowly eating its red pathway through the grass and brier of the hillside. Now as some fresh puff of wind whistles amongst the crags it glows like a furnace, and lights up miles of surrounding country, and now with the dying down of the breeze it grows dim and dull again. By and by it leaves smoking embers in the trail along which it has burned, and creeps slowly on across fresh gullies. Moses' life as a shepherd in the desert must have made him familiar with such sights. Had this fire spread itself from the embers left by some Bedouin encampment? Or was some wandering tribe preparing the soil for its modest sowing of grain? Or had the lightning's flash kindled this little patch of jungle fire? As the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen grow still, and the melancholy camels kneel and sleepily shake their bells, and the solemn shadows grow deeper and yet deeper still, Moses watches from his tent door into the night. The glowing fire needs neither wind to fan it into splendour nor fresh fuel to feed its devouring tongues. It neither pales as other desert fires upon which he had looked before, nor rushes with restless flight from shrub to shrub and gorge to gorge. With a strange mystery of silence and restraint and unabating brightness, it lingers about this one solitary shrub, and,

against all natural expectation, grows more lustrous with the advancing watches of the night.

The curiosity of this lonely shepherd is stirred. "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush burns and is not consumed." But there are problems that cannot be solved by seeing, and the very attempt to deal with them through the senses may blind us to the perception of their true nature. Would that the lesson were better understood in our own day! Inquiry, research, scientific experiment are invaluable methods when applied to fitting and appropriate spheres, but idle and impertinent in the realms immediately touched by the light of the burning bush. Examination of the kind upon which Moses was entering, investigation by help of the natural senses, verification by physical contact, could carry him no further into the mystery, and might dispel the awe out of which a better knowledge was one day to come. Moses must be taught that he was in the presence of no common incident or phenomenon. A voice arrests his attention. We cannot say whether it spake in pealing majesty, or in music of solemn and measured sweetness, or in some such sacred and mystic whisper as Elijah heard when he stood on this same mountain side, with head wrapped in his mantle—a whisper that softly blent itself with his own soliloquies, and was at first, perhaps, scarcely distinguishable from an inward voice. Mystery of the ear adds itself to the mystery of sight. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." A summons to reverence from the awful Being who was revealing Himself, and so laying the foundation of a new and better faith. God demanded all the outward forms

of a rigid reverence as the first step in that fellowship with Himself to which He was about to summon Moses and the nation Moses was destined to lead and to mould.

But what was the precise significance of this mystery for which such an exceptional expression of reverence was demanded? The traditional interpretation tells us that this bush is the symbol of the persecuted Church, and the fire is the fire of persecution kindled by its adversaries. The descendants of the Scotch Covenanters, in adopting this emblem as significant of the splendid triumphs of their past history, and inscribing it upon the official documents of the Church, are lending their high authority to a bit of unsound exegesis. Charles Wesley, who, in his most triumphant poetry, is usually an exact interpreter of Scripture, has followed this gravely inadequate conception :—

> "Though in affliction's furnace tried,
> Unhurt on snares and death I'll tread ;
> Though sin assail, and hell, thrown wide,
> Pour all its flames upon my head,
> Like Moses' bush I'll mount the higher,
> And flourish unconsumed in fire."

One of the latest expositors of sacred history, who has popularised much learning and criticism in English of inimitable grace, the late Dean Stanley, has echoed this same error in his "Lectures on the Jewish Church." Now if the Church, unhurt by the fires of persecution, were the only or indeed the chief thing signified by this incident, the demand made upon the reverence of Moses seems somewhat excessive and inexplicable. A fragile Church defying unhurt the

destructive forces brought to bear upon it is doubtless a holy thing, but not a thing before whose type and shadow a man of God appointed to lead and to rule the Church, must needs take off his shoes and tremble.

If we were seeking for a symbol of finite and perishable life, I know not that we could find a better than by inverting the figure before us. Man with the doom of death before him is like the shrub that Moses had many a time watched in desert fires. The spark kindled by some unknown hand nestles in the dry grass, seizes upon bush or tree, maintains itself by consuming the substance stored up there, and then, after darting skyward in transient splendour, sinks down to earth again as that upon which it fed perishes, leaving only a charred outline as its memorial. All finite life is like that, and exhausts itself with the lapse of time. Rising strength, a brief climax of glory, sudden decline, final darkness—these are the successive stages of its history. The bush burns and is at last consumed. Will not the reverse of that be a parable of the spontaneous, the inexhaustible, and the infinite life into fellowship with which Moses and his people were to come?

The fact that the name Jehovah is revealed in immediate connection with this incident seems to warrant us in reading some reference in this symbol to *God's essential and unsustained existence.* Self-origination, unwasting spontaneity, self-sufficing, absolute, and eternal life, that can only be known by contrast to the finite life of the creature—these are the meanings of the striking object-lesson. Whilst a prince in Egypt, Moses had been accustomed to gaze upon objects of worship in the temples there that

represented the fecundity of nature, but all these forms of life needed to be fed from without as obviously as the fire needs fuel. They belonged to a different category from the uncreated and the self-sustaining life suggested by this shrub in the desert. Moses was face to face at last with a power that did not draw its mystic strength and essential vitality from some material thing it assimilated. All the high moral and spiritual forces radiating from this mighty presence and personality were self-existent. The fire did not depend on the substance of a poor desert bush to feed it. If the tradition that Moses wrote the Ninetieth Psalm be true, he must surely have had the deep teaching of this impressive incident in view when he sang, "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." This is the one glorious, all-containing, all-comprehending life that persists from age to age, when all other life withers like the cut grass and is consumed.

And the vision perhaps indirectly intimates that *God's mysterious love, like His life, was self-derived, inexhaustible, above all outward conditions.* The flame of its unearthly beauty was maintained by an infinite spontaneity of its own. It did not depend for its strength or fervour upon the things it clasped in the embrace of its fidelity and tenderness. The past and future conduct of Israel might offer very little reason or motive for the nourishment and invigoration of the love that was descending upon the elect race and wrapping it about with Divine fervours, and yet the love should burn undimmed. It was not from the virtue of substance present in the bush that the sacred fire was fed. Does not the love of human fatherhood, when it becomes almost Divine in its patience and unwearying

generosity, seem like a dim, finite similitude of the mystery of the burning bush? There are times when no trace of gratitude or dutiful temper in the child appears to stimulate and sustain the free, gracious, untiring parental love. It is a miracle that the holy instinct maintains itself, for it is confronted with years of defiance and alienation. There is a dreadful void of all that might encourage hope and stimulate affection, but with a strange reflection of love from God's fathomless Fatherhood the bush burns and is not consumed. Now in His covenant relation with these hordes of coarse, fickle, petty-spirited slaves in Egypt, yet to be called God's sons, God should be all this and more. The sources of this sacred and inextinguishable fire were hidden from human view. God's love did not borrow its warmth and strength and illuminating splendour from the poor human objects to which it seemed to be clinging.

But if this were all, why need the bush find any place in this wonderful object-lesson? The bush, as well as the mysterious fire that was playing amidst its branches, is meant to teach us something. Does not the bush seem to direct our thought earthward, and suggest some new truth about God's relation to the finite life of men? The pillar of fire which afterwards hovered over the tabernacle would have been just as appropriate a symbol of self-existence as the fire infolding the acacia thorn, if nothing more had been implied and foreshadowed. The fire of the cloud unites itself to the mean life nourished by the sin-smitten and desolate earth.

There were schools of Egyptian thought with which Moses was more or less familiar, which taught that He who was the essence of all life was enshrined in

mystery and quite unknowable. If knowable at all, it was only through the pain and penalty of death. In His deepest and most central life God could not be approached, and if worshipped He must be worshipped in forms which typified the reproductive powers of nature. This incident of the desert seems to suggest that God may take hold of finite life without destroying it by the terrible fervours of His overwhelming presence. It was the Angel of the Covenant who appeared in the flame of the bush as a messenger of the revelation, and the revelation in this parabolic miracle points to Himself and His life-giving mediation and redeeming act. In the form assumed by the Angel of the Covenant the self-existent One comes into the closest possible contact with human life, without destroying it by the fires of His pure and sacred presence. Whilst there was truth in the old conception, that men could only come to see God's face through the penalty of death, an economy was in immediate prospect, in which the death-deserving sin should be taken away, and God should unite Himself with humanity, baptizing it in His own fiery presence, not for destruction, but for life and unwasting blessedness. Humanity should be touched, root and branch, with the central forces of God's awful personality, and, like the desert bush, should be unconsumed.

And in uniting Himself to human nature in the Angel of the Covenant He would unite Himself also to an elect race guided and fed and redeemed through His mediation, and so render that race imperishable in all its spiritual interests and relationships. The indestructible forces of this eternal personality were to communicate themselves to the Church in which

He should come to dwell, and so make that Church proof against defeat and change. The elect life should be nourished from the spring of God's self-sustaining energy. The Church *is* harm-proof, but harm-proof through the sacred fire that is in it.

The chief significance of the symbol, however, lies in what it hints of the truth that God is uncaused in all the powers and attributes of His infinite being. His life, unlike that of the creature, does not depend upon what is external to itself. He is what the new name now teaches Him to be, Jehovah—essential, eternal, uncaused Being, uncaused even when He links Himself to the finite life of earth.

For all that He is in Himself, and for all that power of purifying life and righteousness He brings into those in whom He dwells, He is entitled to the uttermost awe of which the heart is capable.

The vision, with its solemn lessons, had probably *a most vital bearing upon the future character and history of Moses.* It was no unimportant step in training him to that spiritual aptitude for seeing the things of God which made him the foremost of the prophets. Do not think of reverence as one of the second-rate sentiments of the soul, to which no great promises are made. This sense of awe was the threshold to those apocalyptic experiences which brought such privilege and enrichment to his after-life. "He hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." But out of fear grew the highest allurement of love, and without losing that sacred dread which infused itself into his nature on this memorable spot, under the shadow of the mount of God, he came to apprehend such sweetness in this terrible presence, that he prays by and by to see God's glory as the

crowning enchantment of his life. It was before this man, who not only cast sandals aside, and flung himself upon the earth, but buried his face from the excessive splendour, that the vistas of God's illimitable goodness were made to unfold themselves. Do not think that the redeeming grace, which has bowed itself to you with more than the humility of a child, has dissolved the obligation of reverence. But for these acts of awe-struck homage, Moses would never have known the ecstasy of those strange spiritual disclosures that came to him as he crouched in the cleft of the rock. It was to this man who was willing to account the ground holy over which some dim reflection of glory hovered, and shrank away in conscious frailty and self-abasement, that God afterwards spake as "a man speaketh with his friend." It was the man who, in this solemn hour, and in this solitary nook of the wilderness, had learned from God's own lips the lesson of reverence, whom the Divine Lawgiver chose to make His own companion for forty days and forty nights on the mount, and enabled to live a life above earthly helps and dependencies, a life nourished like the life of God, by the secret of the burning bush. God came to be the solitary watcher by the dying couch of him who had at first trembled with oppressive fear. God's touch folded for their burial the hands that had covered the awe-struck face. By a condescending service of honour that was perhaps higher than a translation, God prepared for its last resting-place amongst the crags of Nebo the frame that once quivered and bowed in a great reverence. The sublimest things in religious life and privilege can only come out of reverence.

When the New Testament is compared with the

Old, it may seem to some minds that *the grace of reverence has passed more or less into the background.* The passages in which it is directly enforced are certainly fewer. The apostles, and those whom they commissioned, tell of rent veils, free access to God, and all the tender intimacies which spring up out of adopting grace ; and the fascination of these new and most welcome aspects of truth is apt to make us unmindful of the measureless distance that must ever interpose itself between the Divine and human natures. But if we look beneath the surface a little we shall find that the New Testament is just as emphatic in its presentation of this obligation as the Old. Does the sentiment of reverence seem lost in the freedom and gracious familiarity of that confident sonship in which we are taught to glory ? Let it be remembered what sonship means in Oriental life, and it is in the Oriental sense of the word that the New Testament speaks. Its conception of sonship is not that current in our own fast days, when boys discuss public questions at the dinner-table, and chaff their parents upon terms of complete equality. You must go to Asiatic countries, where the parent is still regarded as little less than superhuman, and greeted with every form of outward homage and prostration, if you would see how sonship and its cognate ideas spell a reverence that is profound and perfect.

Reverence is the comely sheltering sheath within which all the vital New Testament virtues are nurtured. Only the lower orders of plants produce their seeds upon the surface of the leaf, without the protection of floral envelopes and seed-vessels. The religious faith is of the rudest and most elementary type, and will bear only ignoble fruit, where faith is

without this protecting sheath of reverence for its delicate growths. In reverence all the graces and principles of the Christian life lie hidden, and will formulate and crystallise themselves into comely, well-defined, and acceptable shapes when the demand and the occasion arise.

If you take up the virtues with which the New Testament deals, you will see how an underlying reverence is necessary to their free exercise, if not, indeed, to their very existence. FAITH without reverence is a pyramid resting upon its apex. To say that you cannot have faith in one you meet on terms of perfect "camaraderie" might perhaps be exaggerated, but at the least there will be very little occasion felt for the exercise of faith in one you account as on your own level. It will be a faith of a purely theoretical character, and the Bible only takes account of faith in its practical aspects. If you think yourself on the same plane of special knowledge with the lawyer or architect or physician you employ, you will ever be trusting your own judgment rather than his, and vexing yourself with misgivings and responsibilities from which you ought to have relief. There can only be the exercise of an implicit practical faith where there is the acknowledgment of superiority in the one who waits to be trusted. I believe on God in the exact proportion to my sense of the distance between His nature and mine, and this sense of distance is reverence. It is often assumed that the very boldness of faith supersedes reverence, but it is not so. You can only trust in that which is higher than yourself, and which you ever feel and confess to be so. You must cultivate a due feeling of the distance between yourself and God, remembering that He is

in heaven and you on earth—in other words, you must have reverence if you are to possess faith in its fullest and richest sense. St. Luke tells us that Simeon was "a just man and devout," or reverential, "and that he waited for the consolation of Israel." These were the three pillars upon which the stable superstructure of the man's character rested. He would have been incapable of patient and believing waiting, year in and year out, for more than half a century, but for the strain of reverence in his character. We cannot trust God for weary decades and wait for Him without murmuring or impatience unless we are devout and reverential in soul. We shall never be found lingering in calm trust about the temple courts and be privileged, as the recompense of our waiting, to clasp at last the Lord's Christ in our arms unless we are impressed by the vast contrast between God's being and our own, and filled with awe by its frequent contemplation.

There can be no OBEDIENCE that is entirely sincere in its qualities without reverence. That seems to be implied in the order and arrangement of the Ten Commandments. The veneration of God is the root and beginning of worship, as well as of all social morality. This is the subtle element out of which truth, righteousness, and charity are built up. And Christ links reverence and obedience in the pattern prayer He taught His disciples. "Hallowed be Thy name." That was the starting-point for the coming of the kingdom and the complete accomplishment of God's will. The Divine rule will never be established amongst men, nor will the Divine law be kept by those to whom it has been promulgated, till men first learn to fear and to honour and to sanctify the

great and terrible name. Men can only be subject to that which towers immeasurably beyond them. Expediency may sometimes bring us into a more or less adventitious coincidence with a proportion of His requirements, but the spirit of a fine obedience can never leaven the life unless we cherish the thought that He is the Infinite, and we are as nothing before Him.

There can be no RESIGNATION to the Divine will apart from habitual tempers of reverence and godly fear. The soldiers who are setting forth upon a difficult and irksome campaign cannot submit themselves to its sharp requirements unless they recognise the higher knowledge and prerogative of the officers who are leading them. Willing submission and self-denial rest upon the perception of superior status or capacity. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that when Christ prayed in Gethsemane He was heard "for His godly fear." Made though He was in the image of God, and an eternal dweller in the bosom of the Divine Fatherhood, even He needed to cherish the sense of His subordination. Reverence will prepare us for submission to a higher wisdom than our own in the seasons of grievous providential chastisement. The prayers we utter in these times will be unheard, we shall never feel in the air around us the rush of the great angel's wings who came to strengthen our Master in His last distress, nor shall we pass out of our conflicts to be enthroned at the right hand of power unless our prayers are pervaded by that "godly fear" which was the ruling note in Christ's midnight supplications. He was heard for His reverence or "godly fear."

Irreverence implies partial ignorance of God, and

where there is partial ignorance of God the possession of eternal life cannot be rich, free, firmly assured. A man does not truly see who cannot appreciate distance, or who is lacking in the colour sense. Such a defect is no trivial thing for sailor or signalman or engine-driver, and many a life has been sacrificed through an undiscovered blemish of this sort. The man who lacks reverence is labouring under a disability scarcely less disastrous than that of colour blindness, and cannot see the endless scale of Divine splendour that is before him. To say such an one is entirely wanting in the knowledge of God would be too extreme, but God cannot put him to the loftiest ministries. Let us beware of spiritual colour blindness—that inadequate conception of what God is, which shows itself in irreverence.

Most observers of modern life agree in lamenting the fact that there is a marked *decay of the sentiment of reverence.* Rank, genius, parentage itself, are not honoured as in the olden days. Various causes combine to bring about this ominous change. We instinctively revolt from that self-demeaning excess of homage fostered by the feudal systems of the past. Our forefathers reverenced power. We can scarcely do that, or the ruthless anarchist who alights upon our shores with his hand-bag of nitro-glycerine might prove himself a successful candidate for our homage. He carries at least as much power in his hands as ever centred itself in the most famous thrones of antiquity. He may prove himself a conquering Alaric, or Genghis Khan, or Napoleon, who whisks his victorious hosts about with him as personal baggage. Must we reserve our best veneration for that which comes bearing the imprimatur of

long centuries? Many of the institutions held by our ancestors as sacred as the Thibetan holds the person of the Grand Llama, are the mark for raillery in our comic papers. We have learned a more audacious analysis of character, and a more suspicious introspection into motive than earlier generations, and we occupy ourselves in exposing the charlatanism of the past rather than in magnifying its achievements. Criticism takes in hand the great personalities of history, and when its work has been done, lo! the nimbus has vanished that once seemed to make semi-worship a duty. And then we allow not a little of our reverence to go because sentiment is sometimes played off against benign and equitable reform. Misguided men try to make the glamour of antique prestige a buffer between themselves and wise, remedial change. And so the sentiment of reverence suffers in proportion to our care for what is right and humane and progressive. From many sides influences are arising which accelerate the decay of reverence on its human side.

Now the religious and sociological faculties in man are in close sympathy with each other. Just as the speck of disease that appears in some inconspicuous and less necessary member of the body may spread itself to chief limbs and fasten on vital organs and issue in death, so the decay of the reverence that is affected, excessive, and superfluous, unless carefully watched and checked at the right point, may carry decay and destruction into regions that are central to the entire life and manhood. In the fire which has got beyond control there is danger lest palace and temple should be swept away, as well as kennel and rookery which the sanitary authorities ought to

have dealt with. Reverence for that which is infinitely above us may perish in the destruction of false reverence for what is human and possibly evil. The most sacred manifestations of this principle may wither and pass away in the disappearance of those ignorant and idolatrous forms of it that have wrought mischief in the past, and are still used to bar reform and to mock men's endeavours to make the world better. The audacious flippancy with which we scan society around us, and the institutions of the past, may tend to make us blind to the very glory of God Himself.

And in addition to all this, our religious reverence is being directly sapped from two opposite standpoints. The familiarity with religious ideas, which is the outcome of the Protestant Reformation, if not "breeding contempt," may tempt us to account the sacred common. And the danger reappears in some of the latest developments of evangelistic zeal. Not a few estimable people, in their endeavours to reach the coarse and untaught minds around them, clothe the gospel in phraseology which is a strange compound of pietistic cant and gutter-slang. I would not discourage the attempt to do good even in outlandish ways, and to adapt the setting forth of the gospel to every variety of education, nor would I make the common mistake of confounding taste and reverence with each other, and assert that what is reprehensible from the one standpoint is necessarily blameworthy from the other. But there is a grave fear lest religion should be wounded in the house of its most earnest and devoted friends, and the sense of awe should be dispelled by the familiar and grotesque terminology sometimes springing up in connection with slum missions.

At the opposite end of society the scientist deals with the old conception of God in a spirit of ruthless audacity. And yet in the same breath he regrets the decay of reverence, and asks that we will give to what is only human the reversionary interest in the sentiment. The demand is preposterous. We can only venerate men because of those reflections of the Divine which are within them, and when God has passed out of our faith we shall feel ourselves quite free to treat the race with undiscriminating contempt. We might as well expect moon and planets to shine after the sun has been put out, as expect any degree of honour for human nature to be maintained when we have been indoctrinated with the audacious flippancy which characterises some of our scientists in dealing with the idea of God. All true reverence must begin with the reverence of God. If we withhold from God the glory due to His name we shall soon find ourselves living in a world of bitter, undiscriminating, universal contempt and scorn. Perhaps the decay of our reverence for all that is human may be one of God's ironies by which He mocks those who have denied Him His meed of just and proper reverence, and yet are ever crying out, and crying out in vain, for the old-world reverence once shown to wisdom—grey hairs, authority, genius, parentage. "Them that honour Me I will honour, saith the Lord, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

And it will be noted that *this claim for reverence comprehended its form* as well as its spirit, and asserted the temporary holiness of the place to which this instructive manifestation of God's presence had come. The voice, it is true, did not declare the special and abiding consecration of this particular spot. The fire

brought its own consecration and made holy every place upon which it came ere long to shine. We sometimes speak as though Christ had abolished all forms and deconsecrated Jerusalem and Gerizim rather than widened the limits of the traditional consecration, and hallowed every place into sacredness by the downstreaming light of God. Christ's declaration to the woman of Samaria was not reactionary. He enlarged the bounds of the consecration and made the earth-hallowing epiphanies to burn with new splendour, rather than secularised the holy places of the past. He was lifting up the world to the level of the temple rather than bringing down the temple to the level of the world. Do not let us forget the reverence which expresses itself in gesture and outward form. Let the knee be bent in worship where it is possible. If you do not cover up your face, at least close the eyes, and do not stare hither and thither as though the wonder of the bush were a common show for which you had paid your pence. Beware of giddy and frivolous behaviour in God's house.

We are often told that churches in which ritual is high and stately and imposing surpass evangelical churches in reverence. My own observation in Roman Catholic countries would not confirm that view. Except for a few moments during the elevation of the host, I have observed there a lack of reverence, a preoccupation with frivolous things, a fussy self-consciousness and familiarity as marked as in any of the gospel-halls which aim at attracting the unchurched crowd by despising conventions and offering a service in which there is no stiffness. In churches immured in what I take to be error, and

crumbling with the weaknesses which arise from the undue homage of the antique, I thankfully recognise reverence and many other Christian virtues.

In some of the old cities of the Netherlands fair flowers peep over tottering walls and glow in the windows of worm-eaten gables, whilst canals full of slime creep torpidly under the basements. We may see such pictures in some of the churches there. A pure and unselfish devotion, a tranquil reverence, a strange and unearthly angelhood of character, do now and again lift themselves into the sunshine of God's favour above decaying faiths and antique rituals and accretions of superfluous dogma, fetid with the stagnation of death. But I see no necessary connection between the conditions of ruin that prevail and the flowers that lift themselves out of disintegration and dry-rot and miscellaneous slime. True reverence grows from a deeper root than ritual.

This holy temper can only be created by thoughts of God, and the pensiveness and breathless restraint fostered by anthem and wailing litany and rainbow flood of colour falling down from translucent Christs, apostles, and martyrs, may be but the cunning counterfeit of the awe God expects His unaided presence to awaken. There is an awe that sometimes seems to almost stop the very heart-beats that is not necessarily created by the infinite and the unfathomable. I would rather be a covenanter, and have deal table and coarse earthenware communion on the bleak mountain side, than offer to God a counterfeit awe nurtured by subdued cadence and mystic colour and Gothic arch, and not breathed by His Spirit into my heart. I would rather be a

follower of George Fox, and sit with my hat on in a meeting-house akin to a village club-room, than educate myself into an awe which is not purely that of the Divine. Artistic helps to worship are not to be discouraged when they express a true rather than supplement a defective reverence. Never meet God's demand upon your reverence in counterfeit coin. The conjurer sometimes puts water into coloured glasses, and makes the spectator think it is wine. Do not let us practise a petty drawing-room magic in God's presence. The sense of God can alone create reverence, and God is neither voice nor shape nor sound. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." "Let us have grace that we may serve God acceptably and with godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire."

VIII.

GOD AND OBLIGATION, OR THE PATTERN OF SANCTITY.

"It is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy."—1 PET. i. 16.

ST. PETER, with the true instinct of a Jew, is ever reminding us of the links which bind into one the earliest and the latest developments of the kingdom of God upon earth. The words which peal forth again and again to lend their impressive sanction to the legislation of Moses come back to accentuate the counsels addressed by Peter to the Christian Church in the solemn twilight of the apostolic days.

These words are three times repeated in the Book of Leviticus. They are used to emphasise the regulations which distinguish between clean and unclean foods. At every common meal the Jew was reminded that he belonged to a separated race, and must live a life of detachment from the traditions, prejudices, and dominating passions of the less favoured communities around him; a life with a rigid separateness about it, like in some degree to that of the great Jehovah Himself. And when the broad principles of the Ten Commandments are applied to the home, the temple, the market-place, the harvest-field, the vineyard, these words

are inscribed like a golden motto over the instruction. They are heard to reverberate again in the successive admonitions against sins of the flesh. The significant relation to the Old Testament context in which this august mandate occurs seems to imply that obedience to the mere letter of the Mosaic ethic was not the final purpose contemplated in the life of man by the awful Being who spoke from Sinai. The commandments were but the first rude steps of an ascent leading up towards a mysterious and magnificent conformity to the surpassing excellence of God Himself.

We are told that this word "holy" comes down to us from the temple and the tabernacle, and that a metaphor of separation underlies its earliest uses. A "holy thing" is a thing that has been withdrawn from common uses and reserved for specific religious ends. A "holy man" is one upon whom there has been laid an authoritative interdict irrevocably separating him from the pursuits and avocations of common life and binding him to the Divine service. It is easy to see how the term may become applicable to man in this etymological sense, but how can God be called holy in the earliest meaning of the term? He is eternally pure and perfect and separate from sinners, and does not need to draw a line between Himself and the world by a special consecration act.

Well, God is separate from all those gods of the heathen kingdoms who may be thrust by their boastful worshippers into competitive relations with Him. For the most part these gods impersonate the defects, frailties, and defiling passions of their devotees. Indeed, but for the fact that they are complacent to the infirmities of those who serve them, they would

never have been substituted for the one true and living God. With divinities steeped in the tempers of this world no moral comparison is possible. But even when the gods of the heathen are made to represent virtues and heroisms, when they incorporate the fairest ideals of the human imagination and the conscience, when they have been devised not so much as abettors of a nation's policy and power, but as the expression of its loftiest dreams; in disposition and conduct and benign economy they fall immeasurably short of the perfection of the Most High, and He is still separate and alone,—divided from all the competing divinities of man's reverence by a gulf no thought can cross. By acts that are from everlasting to everlasting in their range He makes for Himself a consecrated sphere of life that must be ever and only His own. "Who is a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy."

Is the time-honoured logic of this injunction sound? Is God's pattern a spring of motive and obligation to us? The logic has stood the strain of many centuries: will it do for our critical decade? Moses subscribed to it in his threefold asseveration of this significant formula. Jesus Christ put His stamp upon it: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Paul gave in his adhesion to the process without any misgiving: "Be ye imitators of God as dear children." John gave it currency amongst the churches over which he watched in his beautiful old age: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

How often do we hear men say: "It is no argu-

ment for me that this, or that, or the other man does the thing you are pressing me to undertake. Our circumstances differ ; our training is dissimilar, and the scale of our fortunes is by no means the same. You cannot possibly make the duke's obligation to the county he owns the measure of a ploughman's, or the prince's to the nation the measure of that of a struggling commoner, or the premier's responsibility to the empire the measure of a vestryman's. Our duties are modified by the differences in our positions, resources, opportunities. The pattern of a God surrounded by countless allies, and with nothing to dispute or obstruct His will, cannot surely be binding on this poor, prosy earth with its populations, one and all the creatures of miserable bounds, limitations, incapacities.

Well, let us see if the argument is sound ; and if we can allege nothing against it, let us push it to its last conclusion in our daily lives.

I. The argument at the outset sounds like an argument basing itself upon *the authority which takes its rise in supreme and boundless power.* The Divine Speaker seems to assume unlimited proprietorship over us because He imparts life and determines all the outward conditions under which life maintains itself. That He should dictate the moral conditions under which we pass our existence seems to belong to the vastness of His prerogative.

Now a Jew would have submitted himself at once. He would have said, " The All-Strong bids us imitate the qualities of His own personal life, and there is no fighting against that. Acquiescence is inevitable. Nothing is left us but to bow and to do."

We, however, are disposed to go a little further

into the subject than that, and ask, "Does mere power, however gigantic its scale, create obligation?" It is our privilege to live after the French Revolution, and we are not disposed to submit to superior power for the simple reason that it is superior power. Would not an ethic of that sort lead us to canonise the politic Vicar of Bray, who, to bring himself into harmony with the views of those who happened to have sway, changed his faith from Protestant to Papal, and back again some ten or twelve times in the course of life, and kept his Living to the end? The obligation to which that worldly-wise ecclesiastic yielded was not of a very lofty type. We are not disposed to praise a course of that sort. Power appeals to fear. It addresses the least worthy and honourable part of man's nature. A great revolt against the authority of mere force has been in progress for centuries—a revolt that perhaps finds its finest expression in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." Rather than submit to mere power, it may sometimes be right to nourish the temper indicated in the closing lines of that great poem:—

> "To defy power which seems omnipotent;
> To love and bear; to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change nor falter nor repent."

For God to bind upon us the law of His personal life because He is stronger than we is surely not unlike Fate trying to vanquish Prometheus bound to the rock in the Caucasus. The appeal is to what is least noble in human souls—to weakness, cowardice, servility, self-interest. We hesitate

to bow to the authority that is rooted in superior power only.

Well, whilst usurped power can bring no sanction with it, if the power be original, creative, unlimited in time and space, it does bring essential obligation in its train. It must ever be evil to bow to adventitious power or to power divorced from righteousness. God will not build up His dominion on foundation-stones taken from beneath the throne of evil. He does not want our conformity to His pattern because His power out-towers other types of power, but because it is spontaneous, eternal, and a part of Himself. Creative power brings with it plenary proprietorship. Obligation of unlimited range is inherent in the very nature of the relations existing between one who makes and that which is made. All social rights rest upon this principle or some adaptation of it. Amidst the revolutionary philosophising of the present day no one has ventured to dispute a man's proprietorship in that which his own skill has called into being. Indeed, the very movements which are supposed to be adverse to all forms of property use as their very fulcrum the negative form of this principle: "A man has no right to that which he has not created." If creative power cannot give an indefeasible title to control, then the Indian has no right to the skiff his hands have hewn out of the unclaimed trees of the trackless forest; the shepherd has no right in the wild reeds which he has plucked from the brook-side and adjusted to music; the potter has no right to the clay he has taken from the hill-side and conjured with deft fingers to grace of line; the king has no right over the race for which he has bled, and

whose citizenship and enfranchisement he has carved out with his own sword-arm ; the brain has no right in the thoughts it has conceived in pain and throbbing fire. Creative power does give the title to possess and control and command. If this be not a basis of genuine right there are no rights, courts of justice are a frolic of Bedlam, and our talk of what is due from man to man a fiction and a flimsy dream.

It is for this reason that the inspired record of the law takes us back to the beginning of all things. The wonderful narrative with which the Book of Genesis opens is not thrown as a sop to the scientific curiosity of ruder ages. It is not meant to be geological, or biological, or chronological, but wholly and solely ethical. It guides us to the origin of all obligation. The power that built up our life, and subdued chaos into a universe of order and harmony and grace for our habitation, has the right to direct and determine conduct.

And then, before the giving of the law, we have another picture of creation in which all the old rights are reaffirmed, the creation of an elect and richly-dowered nation out of the black chaos of Egyptian slavery and degradation. A nation called into existence by a fiat of Divine power and compassion, rather than evolved by the skill and prowess of founders and soldier-statesmen, was bound to obey its unseen Maker and Deliverer. The creation of an elect nation by miracle is made the preamble to the decalogue. He whose breath brings the secret of life, whose word makes every wavelet of sunshine or starlight that visits the eye, every atom of air that sweetens and vitalises the blood, whose hand prepares

the foundation upon which all life rests, and strikes the blow which brings our truest enfranchisements, has the right to bind men by His pattern. If He has no right to rule us, right is an unthinkable idea. All the authority of indisputable power is behind this mandate. No mandate ever has had, or ever can have, authority if this lacks it. Infinite power, incomparable kingship, unapproachable majesty concentrate themselves in this imperative "Be ye holy, for I am holy!"

It is fear, not of original and righteous power which degrades, but of usurped, adventitious, unjustly wielded power. Fear is not altogether ignoble; it may be as noble as love if it create shrinking from wrong. A virtuous and wholesome fear is better than a depraved and misdirected affection. The law of self-preservation works through fear, and we do not feel ourselves humiliated by obeying its stern behests. We acquiesce every hour of our lives, and yet maintain the manliness which is our birthright. The sanctity of human life is upheld by fear. If our fears are addressed, the shame in that is not so much to him who speaks, as to us who have so little besides fear that can be impressively addressed. "Fear him that is able to cast both body and soul into hell." Fear is identified with moral obligation in its purest form when it is fear of the incontestably mighty. Unlimited proprietorship over us in the beginning, unlimited proprietorship over us down to the last solemn crisis and consummation! And this proprietorship exercised upon a basis of immaculate and clearly proclaimed righteousness! In recognising authority which rests upon spontaneous unlimited power eternally at one with righteousness, no lack of strength or courage is implied.

The rights of all fatherhoods, the prerogatives of all crowns and thrones and sovereignties, the sanctions of all law and ethic speak in this imperative "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

II. We can carry the argument still further. The authority that here addresses us is not that of supreme power only, but also of *absolute loveliness and perfection.* In bidding us be like Himself God is bidding us be like that we most esteem, for has He not captivated the entire range of our reverence and admiration? It is impossible for us to conceive a character of more complete spiritual excellence than that which is set forth in the pages of the Old Testament, and epitomised in the winning and unblemished life of Jesus Christ, the express image of the Father. The long centuries of sacred history illustrate for us the high union of righteousness and compassion, truth and tenderness, equity and long-suffering, majesty and condescending grace; and the character of Jesus Christ focusses these attributes into a spotless splendour that holds us in a fascination to which awe and love alike contribute. We instinctively recognise that all perfection is gathered up here, and imagination itself cannot add another glory or attraction to the picture. All human ideals of spiritual grandeur are surpassed and eclipsed. The crown of supremacy belongs to God, not by an arbitrary coronation act, but by His own inherent fitness to wear it. We must set ourselves to copy that which we irresistibly worship.

In the exercise of our natural gifts we are bound, as far as may be, to realise our own conception of the best. The thrill of a sensibility always cradles an obligation. The musician whose soul has been visited

by dream-like melodies from other worlds is bound to so group his notes as to realise, for those to whom he sings, the mystic enchantments that have smitten his own soul with wonder. The painter to whose inner sense the subtle charm and secret of glowing sky, or flowered landscape, or fretting sea has made itself known is bound to suggest, as far as the play of colours will do it, the magnificent vision that has possessed his own imagination. All admirations have as their very core and essence the force of a vast moral constraint; and if God be the best of which we can think or reason or dream, if He has conquered all our moral admirations, if He is the loftiest pattern a quick and healthy and highly stimulated conscience can conceive, we are bound to copy Him.

Worship, unless perhaps in its most crude and degraded forms, always implies an obligation to be like him who is its object. We come before God, not as suppliants only, but to recognise the matchless qualities of the Divine attributes, and to lay our tribute of homage at the feet of one who is nobler than the noblest we know. Demon-worship is the only exception to this rule. Under the influence of sheer terror, the poor savage seeks to avert the displeasure of a being more evil perchance than himself. Your outward service has no more of the real genius of worship in it than the request of the sodden tramp for a copper, if you come before God for what you can get only. Unless your worship lead you to realise the unutterable perfection of God, and inspire you with some faint desire to copy Him, you had better bury your God like the corrupting dead out of your sight. For this reason is it that un-

regenerate worship is an offence to God ; it is base, mean, prudential, paying no tribute to the Divine excellence, and void of all desire to copy it. In worship we make solemn and public confession, not only of the claim of His power upon us, but of the obligation under which we are laid by the transcendent perfection of His character to copy that character under the necessary limitations of our finite destiny. The highest form of worship is imitation. The psalm of adoring lip, the homage of bent knee, the strain of upstruggling thought—these things are the mere alphabet of worship. Imitation is the lofty poem for which the alphabet prepares the way. Ringing doxology, beseeching tears, awestruck posture—these are but a husk hiding the rude seed of worship. Imitation is the summer blossom lustrous with the smile of God, sweet with the perfume of His breath, and tender with His countless charities, for which the outward and formal in worship was rudiment and preparation only. The trisagion of the cherubim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts," confesses the law under which earth and heaven alike are placed to be like God.

I need not remind you how in His pattern prayer Christ makes us subscribe to the principle whose gracious operation and benefit we need for ourselves —"Our Father, which art in heaven." Where there is fatherhood there is sonship and its duties, the first of which is to copy the qualities of the highest Fatherhood. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." We must be members of a forgiving family of which a forgiving Father is the head if we are to realise all the wonderful grace solicited in the prayer. In every repetition of it we have to

recognise how imperative it is that we should be like God. As we confess the Divine perfection the voice of unfailing response comes back in reply to our homage, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

III. These words are an argument from *the affinities and similitudes of the Divine and human natures.* When we affirm the obligation to copy we imply some underlying unity of life. Obligation to conform to a specific pattern is dissolved by radical dissimilarity of structure, organisation, faculty. The cedar of Lebanon cannot expect the hyssop which is on the wall to rival the girth of its own trunk, or the strength and gloomy grandeur of its own snow-laden arms. It would be the pitch of all unreason if the golden eagle swooping through the tracks of the highest clouds were to say to the wind-driven butterfly, "Chase our strong kindred in their flight to the gates of the sun." It would have been a cruel absurdity if some one had stepped up to Caliban, or to Quasimodo the dwarf in Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame," who impersonates all ugliness, and had said, "Be Apollo; he is the one mould of physical perfection into which you must try and compress yourself." It would be insane stupidity if Tadema or Burne Jones were to go to some limbless monstrosity in a penny show and say, "Join our school; paint according to our methods; reproduce our best characteristics." The poor wretch lacks the natural endowments which fit him to take his first lessons in art. When you say, "Copy here; carry out there in harmony with the accepted standard," you imply some kind of organic fitness to fulfil the counsel.

God's nature is the archetype of ours. What does it mean when it is said we are "made in God's

image" and quickened to life with God's breath, but that God has put within us the rudiments of His own holiness? The power to grow like God is implanted in man at the very beginning. There is a long-buried seed of spiritual excellence in him old as his dim origins, which the processes of grace are destined to awaken and mature and perfectly fructify.

And to give us further assurance on the subject we are not only reminded of that image whose faint outlines and affinities we still bear, but we are told that this high and holy One has made Himself in our image. The correspondences are guaranteed from two standpoints. He has lived out His perfect life in an environment that is one with our own. In the person of His spotless and eternal Son, God has bowed Himself to the most abject conditions of our life, challenging our temptations, engaging the corrupt and hostile forces that confront us, and giving us a vision of that we are charged to copy, notwithstanding the strain of fierce and varied temptations. In an age more evil than our own He has illustrated the life that is perfect and Divine, and proved earthly holiness possible by maintaining, in the face of all hostile and unkindly influences, the unblemished holiness of heaven.

Men sometimes try to bind us by the mere ideals they cherish, and we almost always dispute the justice of the experiment. But when they seek to bind us by their actual conduct, and say, "Be what I am under conditions precisely the same as those which surround you, for my life and opportunity are parallel with yours," we have no objection to urge in reply. Such a plea perfects obligation.

Both the duty and the hope of holiness grow up

out of a sonship in which we were constituted at the very beginning, and the instincts of which are revived within us by the economies of grace. Grateful love is the motive force and the mainspring of this filial conformity to the Father's pattern. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in ignorance, but as He that called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation and godliness." The forgiving grace of God makes the human spirit plastic to the moulding force of this high example. We are no sooner saved than we bow to the sovereignty of the love that translates us from alienation to family favour, and in the very act of praising and adoring, aspire to copy it. The Apostle Paul has the same thought in his mind when he says, "Be ye therefore imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love even as Christ also loved you." The grace that surrounds us on every side enters our natures and tends to produce there a reflection of the Holy One who has been our Friend and Saviour.

In one of his books Mr. Ruskin says, "Some ten or twelve years ago, when I was first actively engaged in art teaching, a young Scotch student came up to London to put himself under me, having taken many prizes justly with respect to the qualities looked for by the judges in various schools of art. He worked under me very earnestly and patiently for a time, and I was able to praise his doings in what I thought very high terms. Nevertheless there always remained a look of mortification on his face after he had been praised, however unqualifiedly. At last he could hold no longer, but one day when I had been more than usually complimentary, turned to me with

an anxious yet not unconfident expression and asked, 'Do you think, sir, that I shall ever draw as well as Turner?' I paused for a second or two, being much taken aback, and then answered, 'It is more likely you should be made emperor of all the Russias. There is a new emperor every fifteen or twenty years on an average, and by strange hap and fortunate cabal anybody might be made emperor. But there is only one Turner in five hundred years, and God decides without any admission of auxiliary cabal what piece of clay His soul is to be put into."

Come with your largest aspirations to the feet of Jesus Christ and you may count upon a very different answer to that. Shall I ever be strong in faith as Abraham and able to compass that which seems least possible to human thought? Shall I surmount pride and irritability and impatience, and rival Moses, the meekest man upon earth? Shall I break at last into rapt praise like Isaiah and be transported with visions rich in spiritual ecstasy and exalted hope? Shall I come to plead like Elijah and be judged worthy to enter into the very counsels of the Most High? Shall I rival the self-denial and heroism of Paul, or emulate the charity of the gentle and saintly John? Your aspiration may wing itself to yet higher spheres. I am "the firstborn amongst many brethren," and you shall be like Me, and shall realise the very qualities of Him whose manifestation I am. Trust Me, and go forward at My word, for you may be merciful and holy and perfect as the One in whose image you are made. The seed of the forgotten possibility is still in you, and I come to quicken that seed again, and in that quickening to bestow all spiritual grace

and perfection. Yours is the very clay into which God determines to put His eternal ideal.

IV. The argument is an argument from *the living contact and mystic immanency of the Most Holy Himself.* Not only do we possess an innate capability of becoming like God, but the self-same energy that makes God holy dwells in us and blends itself with our life. The very motive which determines God's eternal and unspotted life of blessedness comes to infix itself in us. The power of God's personal holiness, with all its magnificent achievements, lends itself to us for our perfecting.

Three things are implied in this injunction—*accessibility, fellowship, and indwelling energy.*

That which is distant and intangible can never be a legitimate example for our imitation. A man might be born amongst the Pitcairn islanders, with the genius of a Giotto, but he would never rise to the level of a sign-painter unless he could be brought into more stimulating artistic associations than he would find in that island prison. He must come to Europe and see the masterpieces in Munich and Venice and London before he can vie with the princely colourists of the West. It is useless telling some peasant singer of a secluded village that she must produce her notes after the methods inculcated in the academies of Paris and Vienna. *Protégé* and master must be brought into personal relation with each other by the cheque of some generous patron. It is idle counsel to tell a musical instrument maker to copy the varnishes and wood-craft of the matchless makers of Cremona. Those unrivalled makers have been in their graves for centuries, and have taken their secrets with them. There seems little chance of

imitation in such cases without a resurrection of the great craftsmen themselves.

And it is useless telling men to copy God if the model is so far off that they cannot apprehend His presence or seize the qualities of His living attributes. God comes very near to every man who wants to copy His personal perfection, and the reason He seems far off from some is that they have never been inspired with the desire to emulate His character. He is a model who lends Himself to the most intimate handling of reverential natures, and to the closest study of all who love Him and desire to conform themselves to His spiritual similitude.

God is not only accessible, but He has the art of imparting Himself to those who seek Him in sincerity and love. We come into contact with some very gifted men, and are never one whit the better for it. They wrap themselves in icy reserves. One who was himself a brilliant writer, and had access to all the circles of literary life, has said, "An author's dinner-party is one of the most melancholy functions in the world, for each author seems afraid lest a neighbour should steal his ideas, and shuts up his lips as jealously as a man buttons up his pockets in a crowd of thieves." And some men who are not uncommunicative in disposition seem to be as devoid of the power of making their thoughts and enthusiasms infectious as islanders without posts and telegraphs are of giving currency to their views in the outside world. Wherever God comes He imparts some at least of His lofty qualities to the hearts of those who are sensitive to His presence. If we may use that modern term without irreverence, He is the most magnetic being in the universe, inspiring those about Him with His own

thought and love and sacred spiritual ardour. He is ever ready to make known His deepest secret to us.

But He not only makes Himself accessible to us, and opens up to our discernment the deepest secret of His life, He comes to dwell within us, and inform our natures with His hourly inspirations. And if God be in us the imitation of God is not an extravagant or fantastic hope.

It is said that the finest rose-tree in the world is one in Holland which a few years ago had six thousand flowers in bloom at the same time. The poor briar in the hedgerow might well despair of rivalling that wonderful rose-tree and attaining world-wide distinction. But if some kindly hand could transplant it to a choicer soil and give it nurture of needful skill, and if some bud from that wonderful Dutch tree could be grafted into its central fibres, the poor despised growth of the hedgerow might hope one day to bear its thousand blooms and be the wonder of a nation. And poor in all high moral and spiritual qualities as we ourselves may be, grudging in sacrifice, ignoble in spirit, grovelling in motive, yet if God infix His own life within us no limit can be put to our spiritual development. With Christ's engrafted life transfusing itself through the hidden channels of our nature, we may present to the world characters full of uncommon fragrance and rich in manifold spiritual splendours. The imitation of God becomes possible to us because of our union with Christ, God's perfect image, and our very participation in the deepest springs of His wonderful life.

A little time ago one of our scientists said that "in every cubic foot of air it was calculated that there were locked up a thousand foot tons of power. The pro-

blem of science was how to unlock that power and lead it forth as light and heat and energy." The startling thought is surpassed in the facts of the Christian life. We live and move and breathe in the infinite and the Divine. How must we unlock and lead forth this power? That is no longer a question to baffle us. Christ Himself has given us the key. "Every one that asketh receiveth." There is no excuse if we fall short. With such a pledge, let us be light and power and living daily benediction like God Himself.

A man's secular duties to-day are measured by all the fresh forms of power with which science has endowed him. The duty of the seaman on the bridge and of the steersman at the wheel is not measured by the range of his natural eyesight or by the strength of his hand, but by the instruments the optician and the engineer have put within his command. The duty of the Queen's messenger in carrying dispatches is not measured by the speed of row-boats and the modest thirty miles a day he can do on foot, but by swift packets and express-trains. The duty of the responsible manager in a business who is told by his principal to make purchases or effect sales in half a dozen commercial centres at home or abroad, is not measured by his walking power or by the range of his shouting voice, but by cables and telephones and all the resources of scientific commerce. The circumference of his obligation is not defined by that of the five senses, or by the puny powers of hand and foot, but by all the powers that Wheatstone and Morse and Cyrus Field, Edison and Graham Bell, have added to his original functions and endowments.

And so our obligation is not measured by what we

are in ourselves, but by those new ranges and outbursts of energy the Holy Spirit brings into our natures. His forces must be added to our own ; the marvellous possibilities arising out of His inhabitation of human souls, the capacity attainable through His infinite and unfaltering succours, must be discerned and brought into the estimate if we would know the sum of our obligation, the breadth of the law under which we are placed, the lofty standard we are summoned to reach.

Do you recognise that this is the true standard of obligation ? You are sometimes troubled in conscience because you fall below the world's traditional standards of honour, probity, unselfishness. You are not quite at rest perhaps if you come short of those easy and indulgent qualifications commonly laid down as a condition of decent Church membership. You are sometimes humbled and distressed because you lag behind your rickety fellow-believer, and are not quite so pronounced in zeal, fidelity, religious service as he. Are you ever troubled because you fall short of God's standard ? For that is the law, and you ought to be troubled. It is by the higher ethic of God's own personal life that you must adjudge yourself day by day. No ideal short of that will save you from some degree of remorse at last. " Be ye holy, for I am holy."

To be like God is a costly thing, involving stern self-abnegation, and the strenuous application of all that is within you to one end. Well, is God's holiness a cheap and easy and self-indulgent thing ? Did it not cost Him the most cherished treasure of His universe to exercise that holiness and compassionate an offending race ? It is only by the renunciation of self that you can begin, however faintly, to be like God.

IX.

THE ETERNAL AND HIS HABITATIONS.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."—ISA. lvii. 15.

THE God of the Hebrews, it is sometimes said, was tribal only, and had all the limitations of the hard, narrow, unsympathetic race of which He was the imaginary patron. Such a contention is sufficiently refuted by the words before us. With the broadening ages the perfect meaning and music of these words only becomes more significant and impressive. We are now more or less familiar with an arithmetic of the years that would have bewildered the brain of Solomon. In face of some of the numbers with which our mathematicians deal, he would have felt himself little better than a savage who can count up only to the sum of the fingers on one hand. Astronomers have given us entirely new conceptions of space and magnitude. In comparison with the modern conception of the universe, that of the wisest thinkers of antiquity was a mere cell. In all the countries touched by the Christian faith a loftier standard of morality has arisen, and manners and customs have

been strangely softened and refined. And yet it would be impossible to surpass the sublimity, the penetration, the tenderness of the prophet's conception now that science has so vastly expanded our ideas of time, and pushed out almost to infinitude the boundaries of space, and love has seen a new day arise in the redeeming love of the great Son of God.

What a marvellous theology is here presented to us! The idolater is rebuked who makes the object of his worship one who is a creature like ourselves, with beginning of years and end of life, brought into brief view on the tide of destiny and carried away again with its ebb. The true God is eternal. The Pantheist is rebuked who declares that God inhabits with equal complacency the ivory chalice of the lily, the coral heart of the rose, the purple bell of the heather, and the white soul of the holiest saint. God has His own chosen realm of manifestation. "He dwells in the high and the holy place." The worshipper of pomp and power is rebuked who assumes that the God of ineffable majesty must be ungracious to the humble, and unmindful of the abasement and remorse of those who had forgotten Him. "He dwells with the humble and contrite."

We have here three inhabitations that lie within and round about each other like concentric circles. I. *God's inhabitation of infinite time* is announced. "He inhabiteth eternity." That rests upon the essential properties of an unbegotten being. II. *We are reminded of His inhabitation of selected space.* "I dwell in the high and holy place." That rests upon His free elective affinities. III. We are assured of *the mystery of His inhabitation of broken and*

lowly hearts. "With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." That rests upon His pure compassion.

I. The first great theme of meditation the text brings before us is *God's inhabitation of infinite time.*

To help us to get out of ourselves and away from the puny standards of our hand-breadth life, let us think of the periods marked out for us by the events of human history. It is a very little fragment of the sum total of that history which one life can touch. Memorial arches are sometimes to be seen in China erected to virtuous old men, favourites of Providence, of whom it is said that they had the privilege of seeing five generations of descendants dwelling under the same roof with them. Perhaps eighty or ninety years before that, they had been the youngest representatives of a similar series of generations. And yet even in this indirect way one of these venerable men would scarcely touch a century on each side of him, and he would have an active interest only in the few events of the sum total that were nearest his own time. Nominally he is the connecting link between two whole centuries, but yet how little does it really mean!

How small a span the lifetime of the man who sees the last of his contemporaries buried compared with that of an empire! The oldest empire of which I have any knowledge has lasted about five thousand years. Egyptian history is said to go further back than that, but with what measure of proof I cannot say. How slight a fraction of the unknown whole is the longest chronology of even mythical history! If soul transmigration were true, a man would need to be re-born a hundred times to watch the entire

sweep of the panorama. The human race is said to have passed through a stone, a bronze, an iron age, and to trace the growth of these successive phases of civilisation we should need three hundred lifetimes. And yet that is not a single grain in the glass that measures out God's countless years.

Let us take a geological unit of reckoning. From the time when primitive man sat in his cave and scratched a rude picture of the mammoth he had just killed on its ivory tusk, is but an hour in comparison with the term of some of the changes indicated by a series of coast-lines, popularly described as "parallel roads." It is said that the action of the rain lowers the level of the areas drained by our chief English rivers about an inch in every century. In the Yellowstone region of Colorado there are chasms nearly a mile in sheer depth, at the bottom of which rivers are running, and it is said that these rivers have cut out of the solid rock the deep channels in which they move, and that they were once flowing over the top of the tableland. That process would take rather more than half a million of years, and to watch it from beginning to end a band of five hundred Methuselahs would be needed, each coming fresh upon the scene in his childhood just as his predecessor was summoned from his post at the bidding of death. And yet half a million of years is a fraction only of the period demanded for all the changes through which the planet has passed—consolidation by cooling, intermittent glaciation, the march and slow elaboration of organic life. But the bewildering calculations with which geology works do but mark a point on the firmament of God's everlasting days.

Let us take a more ambitious scale of reckoning.

The late Mr. Proctor said the planets were like a group of human beings in different stages of growth and development. Some of them were probably in their babyhood, and not yet ripe for the life-bearing destinies that might probably be before them. Others, such as our earth, were in their very prime and maturity. And other of the planets had already passed through babyhood, youth, and maturity, and had entered upon a useless and decrepit old age. They were barren, played-out, infertile, and had been so for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of years. And the planetary system is one of myriads of similar systems, some of which may have been contemporaneous, and some of which may have existed in succession to each other; and the solar system may be a mere mushroom growth of the night, a Jonah's gourd in comparison with the more patriarchal groups of the firmament. What a term of measurement does that give us! The life of the entire stellar universe, however, is but the throb of the second-hand on the dial that measures out God's everlasting days.

But beyond these realms of life there are other realms which the Bible suggests to us. The sons of light stood by the cradle of these worlds and systems, the computation of whose years baffles our arithmetic, and shouted for joy at their birth. The spiritual hosts about God's throne may have seen the first steps of the light as it started on its pilgrimage through the fields of space, and may have watched matter come into the field of vision at the Divine word and round itself into worlds. They may have been observers of the stupendous play of primeval forces, and seen barren orbs blossom like the rose. And yet in comparison with the unbegotten life,

these holy beings, whose duration goes far beyond that of the visible universe, are but of yesterday. You have sometimes seen tottering babes on the highway put their hoops to race the express train as it rushes past towards the distant goal at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Hoops and locomotive wheels were in the same plane of parallel for the fraction of a second only. The attempt to bring the firstborn sons of light into comparison with God's cycles is just like that. He has been sweeping on through interminable ages towards His magnificent aims, and they have been by His side for a brief second only.

But the periods through the contemplation of which we have been trying to enlarge our conception of time so as to think with more amazement of God's eternity run side by side with each other. Let us assume for a moment they could be made successive and joined into one. Every individual life is drawn out from the complex history with which it has been interwoven and joined at its close to the beginning of another life. Add to that the sum of the successive life-histories of each of the millions of suns and stars in the firmament. To that join on the entire sum of the years lived by the hosts of God before His throne. What a stupendous measuring line that gives us! Our thought cannot very well get beyond that, for we have reached the very frontiers of the finite. And yet the cycle round which such a measuring line is placed, when brought into comparison with the larger cycle God fills, is but like the web woven by the insect, put side by side with the orbit described by all the constellations as they sweep round some unknown and mysterious centre of all the other centres in the fields of space.

And God fills the illimitable time which is to be, with the glory of His presence just as completely as that which is already past. "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God."

These words do far more than barely assert that God has an unbegotten and an interminable life. Not only has He lived through these epochs of unthinkable immensity, He has also vitalised them with the glory of His presence, filling their expanse with His own blessed plenitude of wisdom and sympathy and strength. In every epoch of time He moves as freely and familiarly as we move in the little round of our daily lot. These stretches of mysterious time are strange, terrifying, unknown to us, but He is at home there, for they are the realms He inhabits and possesses and informs, and if we make God our Friend we shall one day be at home there likewise. He is the King of eternity, pervading the dominion of boundless time with the potencies of His attributes, controlling their issues and their outworkings, and making the whole tremulous with the forces of His sacred personality.

It was once supposed that the dark patch in the heavens called the Magellan clouds was starless, an enigma of vacancy in the glittering skies. That idea is given up now, although the particular portion of the heavens to which the name is applied is not so rich in stars as the other parts. In all eternity past there is no vacant century, no unpeopled epoch, no barren, unillumined, God-lacking millennium. He fills immeasurable time to its utmost dimension, every moment of the vast eternity, past and to be, pulsating with God's conscious presence.

Is not such an One high and lofty indeed? We

measure the greatness of a personality by the periods through which it can assert its genius. Every man who can claim to influence the lives of men a hundred years hence, and be cherished in their memories, has an element of true greatness about him. Some names live a thousand years, and a rare name here and there shines after the lapse of a millennium three or four times told. God fills uncounted eons with the force of His will, the majesty of His power, the captivation of His gentleness, the splendour of His ever-active presence. That He fills eternity with His active attributes is a mark of the greatness which belongs to Him and to Him alone.

But this is not all that is to be told concerning God. He condescends to the finite. "He humbles Himself," in the language of the Psalmist, "to behold the things that are in heaven and upon the earth." The first step in His gracious descent is wonderful, and the second step more wonderful still.

II. We are reminded of *God's inhabitation of selected space.* "I dwell in the high and holy place." God presents Himself to us in these words as a being who brings His noblest attributes within space-limits because the dwellers in the high and holy place with whom He communes are beings to whom space-limits attach. And thus we see the force in the Psalmist's declaration when he asserts that God "humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in *heaven.*" It is an act of condescension to pass, if we may be allowed the license of the expression, out of His own essential infinite into the sublimest associations of finite life.

The prophet probably thought of "the high and holy place" as a kingdom of celestial beauty and a scene of

celestial fellowship. The tone of a country's landscapes, the qualities of its products, the grace or ugliness of its homes, are determined by the character of its inhabitants. Visit a colony that has been newly settled and you will soon see that, although Nature is lavish in her gifts, the face of the country lacks the refinement that comes with centuries of occupation by a civilised race. The very soil seems coarse and crude, the turf is a stringy and tangled mass, more like unspun hemp than grass, and the vegetation is rank and acrid and crabbed. Prolonged tillage seems to mellow the very colours of the landscape, fields and meadows become at last a mirror to reflect the grace and taste of those who have settled here, and Nature herself is made new. What must be the fairness of the place which God has pervaded with the beauty of His presence for long millenniums! When God came down to the temple compassed about with His melodious hosts, they seemed to bring from the far-off realm a beauty unknown to earth. Rightly is that place called "high and holy" which is the sanctuary within whose curtains those whose natures are nearest akin to the pure and blessed nature of God have held converse with their King through the uncounted eons of the past.

God dwells here with *an express and intentional manifestation* wanting in those extensions of His wisdom and power which touch every part of the universe alike. God is present, but not equally present and unveiled in all the orbs of the firmament. There are elect realms in which He vouchsafes peculiar epiphanies of His majesty and spiritual perfection. Be deaf to that philosophic Pantheism which laughs at the idea of a heaven filled with the glory of

God's immediate presence and insists upon the dogma that God pervades all parts of the universe alike, and that the throb of His life admits of no degrees. Every square inch of the night has in it gleams of the sun which have been stored up during the day, or are reflected in indirect ways, but that is no reason why we should deny the pageant of the sunrise or the fairy canopies of purple and gold through which the great orb passes at his setting. Has God affections? Can He love more and less? Has He a will? Can He rule the revelations of His own life? Then if there be a holy of holies for the universe, into which the highest and best of all past creations has been gathered, He must dwell there. If there be a realm whose associations are incomparably lofty, and where the common life pivots itself on the most exalted spiritual motives, as life here pivots itself on a struggle to satisfy the base needs of the flesh, He must make that His home. This inhabitation of an elect realm is based upon a principle of moral compatibility. He delights to abide there in a sense in which He does not delight to fill every fragment of infinite time.

We are sometimes told that heaven is the dream of human selfishness. Men desire a destiny in which they shall possess all the privileges and satisfactions of this life and none of its disabilities. It is the solicitation of bleeding and broken and disappointed hearts for tenderer love, deeper contentment, more stable homes than they can discover here. It is utopia-planning on its spiritual side. Away with such assertions, for God's nature demands a heaven just as strongly as ours.

It is the congenial atmosphere which brings out to view the innate splendour of the flower, and it cannot

reach the perfection of its type under alien conditions. Heart must find kindred heart to which it can open itself unless the affections it enshrines are to shrink and wither and waste. Science must have comradeship if it is to be drawn forth to tell its marvels and debate its future hopes. You say, "I travelled in the railway carriage with a great singer, and he never opened his lips." Well, he was not likely to do so in a little box that was turned into a pandemonium by the shrieking of the engine. "I rode in the cars with a poet, and he stuttered very poor prose when speaking to the conductor." Well, in a street car he was not likely to take the hood off the cage in which his muse sings. Unless there were a high and holy place in which God could disclose glorious mysteries hidden from the creation at large, the Divine nature itself would be condemned to humiliating and unwelcome repressions. It is His delight to abide there. That is the sphere of His sympathies, as the eternities are the environing conditions of His undiscriminating power. The universe is His world, but this is the home in which He holds converse with those who are closest to His heart. The orbits of revolving suns are the chariot tracks which tell of His visitations of power in the far-off regions of His empire. The high and holy place is the banqueting-hall in which He holds high festival with the princes of the skies, the home circle where He gathers His wondering children to His side in sacred intimacies veiled from strangers.

Where else could He manifest Himself? Could He lavish the richest attributes of His being upon insensate atoms only? Could He consent to be nothing but a force in a universe rising in the higher ranges of its organisations above the level of force,

and touching glorious altitudes of reason and righteousness and love? The scientist complains that there is no physical demonstration of God in the realms of which His own researches have made Him cognisant. Could God pour out the mystery of His bosom into gross, insensate, unreceptive gases and dust grains only? Do not make the verdict of unsanctified genius your answer to the question whether God is knowable, and how far He has opened communications with the beings He has fashioned. There are worlds of manifestation veiled from us. Where but in the high and holy place can you expect the open vision of Him whose name is holy, and who is high above all others? Greatness can only be known by greatness; wisdom can only be seized and interpreted by wisdom; purity only can honour the perfection and uplift the praises of infinite and absolute sanctity. The full-orbed splendour of the Most High can never be known outside the limits of the high and holy place. It is true "heaven and earth are full of His glory," but earth redolent with the incense of the sweetest springtides, dainty with the flowers that bloom only in the steps of the King, overarched with those glowing canopies of cloud His own skill spreads forth, consecrated by the most overwhelming theophanies He has ever vouchsafed to mortals, earth is but "His footstool" whilst heaven is "His throne." "I dwell in the high and holy place."

III. God's inhabitation of *the individual hearts of His contrite ones is declared.* This rests upon His pure compassion. "With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The words suggest a contrast with the preceding inhabitations. Not only does He stoop to the finite that is holy but also

to the finite that is frail, "He humbleth Himself to behold the things which are in heaven," and incomparably more marvellous still, "the things that are on earth." "He is exalted far above all heavens, yet hath He respect unto the lowly," coming near to direct and purify and establish the hearts that have been seared and blackened with sin, if such hearts do but tremble at His judgments.

That He who inhabits eternity and receives the homage of the high and holy place should seek this latest enshrinement is a mystery, but it is a self-consistent mystery. If man is to be the subject of Divine revelations at all, how should those revelations begin but at this point of meeting? In making the humbled heart sensible of His presence He appeals more directly to man's consciousness than would be possible by any other method. He must deal with us first in the sphere of the affections. His opening revelations are revelations of healing tenderness to that part of man's nature which is most susceptible to His influence. Science asks to know God as a force in nature, and will consent to know Him only by the tests which itself devises and ordains. A God so known would be by the very nature of things an incarnation of force and nothing more, and His worship would resolve itself into an ignoble serfdom to the irresistible. To find God in nature is not the first but the very last step in our religious education. No wonder God hides Himself in the thick darkness when men seek to know Him by that method. We cry for Him in the purple of the twilight hills and amidst the glow of setting suns. But no voice comes from this fabric of enchanting colour, and our hearts are chilled by the silence till they ache

again. We cry for Him in the strength of the mountains and the tumult of the seas and the march of worlds. But the inexorable seems to assert itself, and the force present there sweeps on to its end without giving us a single glance of pitifulness or recognition. We ask that He would give us some sign of His immanent love from beneath the subtle mechanism of life. Let Him speak to us from the protoplasmic cell. But no voice answers us. Not a link in the mechanism of organic life stirs from its fated pathway. The great cold chain glides on unheeding. The cry breaks forth, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and our natures are touched. The appeal is strangely and tenderly answered, answered by the dawning presence of Him who once sojourned in the flesh as the Friend of sinners, for our fear is passed, our heart-ache eased, and glad sunrise diffused within us. "Hidden from the wise and prudent," He has been revealed to the weakness the simplicity, and the pitiful tears of "babes."

That light and heat rays are both present in the sunbeam is a familiar fact, but it is not so well known that the optic nerve which is sensitive to the light rays is unconscious of the presence of the heat rays. Professor Tyndall verified this fact by a most interesting and critical experiment. Having prepared a slide by a chemical process which made it exclude the light rays and give free admission to the heat rays, he cut a small hole in a screen so that the heat rays passing though the slide could fall upon a piece of platinum foil. The platinum at once grew red-hot. At the risk of destroying his own sight he then brought the retina of the eye into the focus of the heat rays. Not the slightest sensation of heat was experienced.

The explanation, he tells us, is probably this—the oscillations of the heat rays, which differ from those of the light rays, are not timed to the conditions of the optic nerve. That nerve has been so adjusted that it responds only to the light rays with which it is in consonance, and is quite dead to the heat rays which elude its consciousness.

And is it not thus with that sense of God which awakens within us? Power and love unite themselves in His person, but the scientist fails to realise His power, whilst the penitent is vividly sensible of His tenderness. The human heart is attuned to the revelation of God in grace, but not, in the beginning at least, to the revelation of God in nature. We seek Him in the gigantic pulsations of the firmament and the throes of the mountains and the silent expansions and forthputtings of life. We know He must be there, but He does not disclose Himself to our consciousness. The subtle undulations of His attributes in the Creation are beyond the range of our sense perceptions. We cannot detect the Divine forces that throb in worlds and energise evolutions and well up through boundless time, for they transcend the adjustment of our thought. But the goings forth of His redeeming compassions are in unison with human heart-beats. When His mercy lightens upon us it finds out quick and quivering fibres in our souls. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." That truth gets into the affections and puts mystic fire at their source. "I am He that blotteth out thine iniquities for My name's sake." That discovers a sensitive point in our moral structure and makes it thrill again. We have no scientific intimation of the fact that "He telleth

the number of the stars." The experimental proof of a conception like that is beyond us. But there is a strange responsive movement at the centre of our being when we read that "He bindeth up the broken in heart and healeth all their wounds." Science fails to track God as He moves to and fro in the expanse of the ages, spreading out the realms of infinite time as a curtain for His habitation. But a blessed and a conscious experience is called up within us as we read that "He dwells with the humble and the contrite."

This is a mystery of condescension, but it is a self-consistent mystery. The revival and homeward return of the life that came from God is the clue to this enigma of pity and gentleness. It is no slight thing to recover and restore that life. By this inhabitation of contrite hearts the Eternal will add at last a new kingdom to the high and holy place where He is enshrined. Through His redeeming visitations of the sons of men He will educe God-glorifying qualities of love unknown before even there. From those to whom He so strangely bows Himself He will attract a devotion of which those never needing a Saviour may be incapable. "We love Him because He first loved us,"—true for angels, but uniquely true for us. A love kindled by redeeming love must surely have unexampled virtue in it. The song of gratitude in the dissolute woman on whom Simon sneered and trod may be trained to outring the symphonies of seraphs. A new element will be brought into the life of the high and holy place, and the manifestation of God will be widened, intensified, enhanced. To what may not the life grow which is warmed by the breath and watered by the

tears of an indwelling and redeeming God? The very eternities God inhabits gather new glory from God's inhabitation of contrite hearts.

In the first pang of sorrow, in the first blush of shame, in the cry of relenting that comes up out of the discords of human rebellion, in the bitter sense of weakness, frailty, failure, God comes near and possesses the heart with His healing love as expressly as He fills the high and holy place. If you are poor in spirit, humble, abject, expect His instant indwelling. He comes to the penitent man or woman who mourns apart as well as to the collective Israel.

Remember what a sacred thing contrition is. God broods in its earliest forms. Do not despise it either in yourselves or others. Never say it is unmanly vacillation as you see how mistaken you have been, and confess for the hundredth time the sin that still cleaves to you. All this is the first step of a process that culminates in the enthronement of God within you and heralds a new advent. When you see a child of man, however abject, humbled under chastisement, admitting the bitterness of sin, showing some faint solicitation of Divine things, wanting to be better, remember all that veils the very presence which abashes angels. In seeking to foster the contrition of the guiltiest you are dealing with holy things. God is as truly present in the first sigh, in the speechless sin-forsaking vow, in the home-look of the prodigal, as before the mercy-seat. He comes to religious life in its lowliest forms. "We are saved by faith," but the presence that makes faith saving enters the opening heart long before penitence has matured into faith. You have not to wait for an afflatus of Divine power which will make your faith saving. If you mourn for

sin God is with and in you, and the faith you put forth will be God-helped. Dost thou mourn for sin, however faintly? Blessed art thou, for thou shalt be comforted. Sorrow is godly if He be in it and shall work life through Him. Oh the reviving power of His indwelling! Sorrow shall be lifted into rejoicing faith, and faith shall be so richly illumined by the God who shines upon it that it shall be not less than sight but more. May the exalted Prince and Saviour make us truly contrite so that this Great Being may be enshrined within our hearts now, and that, sanctified by this mysterious Guestship, we may be made ready for the high and holy place where God shall be "all in all" throughout endless ages.

X.

IMPERFECT CONTRITION AND GOD'S RESPONSE TO IT.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."—LUKE xv. 20.

THE father's kiss conveys and implies the assurance of forgiveness. When Christian believers claim that they already possess this high grace, there is not the slightest assumption on their part of ethical superiority or perfection. Men of the world say there is, for they take it for granted that all profession of Divine favour and salvation unmistakably certified to the individual conscience is Pharisaic. Underlying the disdain sometimes directed against that blessed state of privilege into which saved men and women assert that they have been introduced there is of course a basis of ignorance and legalism. The world assumes in its criticisms that men can only possess what they have themselves merited, and sneers at the confident profession of a grace that seems totally undeserved.

If this parable could be uncoupled from the name of overwhelming authority attached to it, and could come before the world as a South Sea legend or a fragment of Indian folk-lore, the world would say, "The picture, though not without elements of beauty,

is disfigured by the extravagance and disproportion of some of its details. No dissolute and undutiful son could ever be taken back upon these easy terms. It is an anomaly to fix the crisis of reconciliation at such an early stage in the history. The father did not and could not give the kiss of complete reconciliation till the son had rendered months of lowly, unrepining, assiduous service. He must needs first see how the romantic reconciliation will take with the first-born son, and be accepted by the other members of the household.

That is the temper of legalism, and it is precisely that temper which leads the world to depreciate an imperfect believer's profession of assurance.

You leave no place for God's grace in all that, and your criticism is a crystallised insult to the love of God's Fatherhood. In sneering at the knowledge the believer claims to have that God has received him into His family, you are not sneering ~~as you suppose~~ at the defect and fallibility and moral dinginess of vain, insignificant pietists, but at the vast grace and condescension of God to His humbled, woe-begone children, for Christian assurance does not rest upon what we have achieved in our relation to God, but upon what God is to us. There is no praise of God's grace in legalism. In asserting that God has indeed looked upon us with special pitying recognition, and that we have felt the kiss of His pacifying pardon upon our spirits, we are not claiming any achievement for ourselves. We are not what we were in the first dawn of life. Alas! we are far short of that. We are not that which we set ourselves one day to become. We are equally far from that. There is little resemblance in us to that ideal towards which

God is guiding us by His free compassions. We have scarcely advanced a single step towards that. Not within sight of the threshold of our new moral destinies do we find ourselves. We do not claim to be more than weak-limbed, slouching, ill-conditioned, tatterdemalion penitents. And yet if we claim in even this stage that we have felt the embrace of God's great arms of forgiveness about us, we are claiming no more for ourselves than Jesus Christ claimed for us by the glorious analogies of this parable. God's expressions of complacency are not all reserved for the crowning achievements of our matured faith upon earth. Before there has been any great outward achievement of faith at all, the Father's goodwill and approval are veritably assured to us. Do not think of me as a strutting pietist, disporting a brave pageant of sanctimonious pretension in the sun, because I claim the Father has looked upon me and kissed into my nature that unmistakable forgiveness which is the heritage of elect souls. I may seem little better than a wreck, a break-down, an aborted type of all that is noblest in human life, and yet if Jesus Christ declared the will of the Father in this parable, my vast claim may be gloriously true.

What matters it that the world may be unanimous in challenging my professions of penitence? The society papers would assuredly treat those professions with contempt. They might possibly be sneered at in a law-court by the judge who had a special vocation to ignore motive where it is ostensibly good, and to dilate upon it at length where he suspects that it may chance to be bad. And yet God may accept a penitence that a cynical world overhauls only that it may discredit and spurn. The proud, matter-of-fact

casuist may tell me just how many furlongs and perches I am off from the dividing-line of respectability. If that be so I will at least claim that God beams His forgiveness upon me whilst I am still outside that dividing-line. "When he was yet a great way off."

Men of the cold, worldly spirit seem to think that they must first let in their favour upon their fellows, before God's favour and forgiveness can burst like a healing sunrise upon their darkened lives, that penitents must needs wear sackcloth for long before they can be clad in the royal purple, that, like men just snatched from famine, they must be fed with the crumbs and sips and morsels of our poor human sympathy before the dainties of God's house can be put before them. To hear some people talk one might get the impression that they themselves are the great centres of authoritative forgiveness, and that the great Spirit of the Father is some little priest that they themselves have commissioned to echo their magnanimous absolutions.

If the parable had recognised this spirit it would have postponed the father's kiss till the music and dancing and hilarity of the household had stirred the old fount of fatherhood in the stern, dignified, unyielding head of the family. Contrite men, or men verging on contrition only, may be clasped very close to God's heart whilst still far removed from the admiration and esteem of their brothers and of the servants of the house.

In the rehabilitation of this outcast youth we must not fail to observe that there are two stages, *the human* and *the Divine*, and the Divine must have necessary preference over the human. At the foot of the hill on the outskirts of the old man's farm, or

beneath the silver-grey canopy of some wayside olive, or under the walls of the vineyard close by the watchtower, there was the eager embrace that anticipated confession and gave the wayward youth his lost place in the father's heart, and there was the kiss that wiped out the reproach of past years and restored to him a dower of love almost as rich as when he lay in smiling babyhood on his mother's lap. All that was the prerogative not only of the father's sovereign authority in the household, but the right no less of his unexampled and transcendent love. His love would not suffer him to send his steward even to read an official absolution over the young man's head. Between the father and the lad alone that sacred transaction must take place. And then came ring and robe and fatted calf, the signs that commended him afresh to the favour and good-will of the household. That was after he had come to the threshold and been drawn across it once more in forgiving love. But long before that, the father's tender soul had breathed itself into the young man's aching bosom.

You may not share the ungenerous temper of the elder brother. A heart for human infirmity kind as a Madonna's may distinguish you from many of your fellows, and yet God's forgiveness anticipates yours. When a wanderer is to be welcomed home again, His eye keen with the infinitude of love outsees the quick glance of those ministers of His that do His pleasure, and His feet outfly the pinions of archangels. Do not suppose that the genuine penitent must be marked down by your slow, half-darkened perception before God discerns him, that it is yours to act the part of scout, and when you get trace of a salvable human soul signal to the great potentate who crawls wearily after

you. Do not suppose when God is about to pass by in mercy you must needs be standing near to commend to God's care the man who has been spoiled by thieves.

The first delicate textures of the vegetable kingdom are woven deep down out of the reach of human sight. In one of the early months of the year you pass field or garden, and you say within yourself nothing is growing there for the present. Not a coy shoot or blossom is to be seen. Universal death prevails, or at least sleep deep and dark as death. If you could possess the faculty once supposed to be connected with the divining rod, and see a foot beneath the soil, you would still say no germinating force has come into play as yet. Not a single seed or bulb or tuber has given any sign of activity. But within the confines of that brown husk there has been an unsuspected movement. As an American writer says in a volume of Nature sketches, "That is not spring we commonly call spring. When the skeleton trees have just awakened into tender life, and the hedgerows are white with hawthorn snows, and the lanes are fragrant with the incense of newly opened flowers, we call that spring. But it is a misnomer. That is early summer. It was spring whilst skies were yet overcast, and bleak winds were blowing, and birds were dumb, for then the sap which produced all these delicate traceries of foliage was restlessly coursing through trunk and branch, and cells were breaking up and rearranging themselves into larger colonies of cells. The first gossamer threads of life were weaving themselves." All life dawns away from every eye but God's. The world's rude winds would blight if suffered to touch it.

And so with the life of filial love and service and devotion. Do not imagine it must needs come into existence under your observation and nurture and patronage. There is a time when it has nothing but its own past memories and the warm breath of God's secret kiss to foster it. Do not assume you must be able to see it. There is a secret spring of spiritual movement in the heart when that portion of the outward life you can watch is bleak, barren, cloudy as early March. The line of demarcation between passion and spirituality is not drawn at the maturity and perfection of a fruit-bearing Christian life. It is present in a very crude and rudimentary state of penitence, indeed, which is sure to challenge the criticism and animadversion of hearts less loving and indulgent than God's. The true crisis and starting-point of reconciliation is not within the rejoicing household. "A great way off."

The son would not seem to have reached any very high plane of moral life and feeling when the father met him. He was hunger-hunted, that was all. Forlorn, penniless, turned adrift by his boon companions, running away from his ignoble task of feeding the swine, haunted by the black spectre of famine—what a mark for satire! That penitence? It looks more like low cunning, ill-veiled scheming self-interest. Anybody but the father would be tempted to say that. He is impelled by just about as much virtue as the flocks of vultures or the armies of locusts in their flights. He is turning himself to greener pastures than those that lay behind him, that is all. The action has scarcely any strain of moral sentiment and aspiration in it whatsoever. He has been hounded by misery into a passing truce with his

father, and has just about as much care for him as ever.

Well, it was on a comparatively ignoble level that the young man was moving, but the level led by unmistakable gradients that the father's eye could follow into the far-off future, up to something nobler and better at last, and "a great way off" though he was, the father saw and flew to greet him.

The cast-iron philosopher may hurl his taunts at the man who has been impressed with the idea that godliness is *full of promise for the life that now is.* He may pour contempt on the poor sot who has been influenced by the motives that the Temperance lecturer dangles before him, and who wants good shoes to his feet and a better coat to his back, and whose first desire in connection with religion may be the desire for a less squalid and loveless home. And yet, defective in all high and noble motive as his repentance may be, God for the time being accepts it. In passing from a state of gross self-indulgence and animalism to what is high and pure and holy, the man must pass, more or less rapidly as the case may be, through a state of intermediate repentance that has the fibres of latent selfishness in it.

The first movements of the man's mind before it has been transformed by the magic effusion of the father's love cannot escape some stain of the old sordidness. The prodigal on his way back to his lost estate must pass through a stage of imperfect contritions.

If it is the wrath to come rather than the wrath and wretchedness he is leaving behind that excites his first movement towards home, his repentance is still open to *the impeachment of self-interest.* We

may readily assent to all that the sceptic says about the defectiveness of the virtue that is stimulated by the slavish fear of hell or the selfish hope of heaven. A virtue of that sort does not conform to all the canons of Christian teaching. And yet if we are to have in a nature that has deteriorated into selfishness any kind of repentance some place in the scheme of recovery must be allowed to motives that are mixed and prudential in their quality. A man cannot count up to ten without passing through the twos and threes. You can have no repentance at all unless the selfish mind can be allowed to rise through the graded ascent of a more or less selfish repentance into what is pure and disinterested and Divine; for humanly speaking the continuity of good in the soul has been hopelessly broken. The prodigal might be acting just as much from an interested motive as the hired servant, and yet in the imperfect motive that brought him once more within the range of the father's influence and generosity there lay all the possibilities of a restored and magnanimous sonship. The father saw the dip and trend and direction in this pathway of imperfect motive. He found the son with much of the ignoble pathway yet to traverse, but he dealt with him notwithstanding as though he had already reached that platform of unselfishness and exalted life to which his imperfect repentance was slowly but surely taking him.

Naturalists tell us that the wolf or jackal is the ancestor of all the existing breeds of dogs. Let us picture some scene in the history of primitive man. A pair of wolves pressed by the severity of a protracted winter come whining round the hut of a savage. Enemies of his race though they are, he

takes pity upon their condition, and shares with them some portion of the food he has laid by for winter use. The creatures repeat their visit, and at last begin to show some sign of affection and gratitude to their benefactor. Between the wolves, half-tamed by starvation, and the savage a tie of companionship grows up. The savage musters courage to take them into his homestead, and when the winter is gone trains them to share the labours of the chase. No genuine affinity there, you may be ready to say. The cruel beasts have come to be fed, and the old bloody instincts sleep there still. These creatures are fierce, treacherous, incapable of faithful attachment; but the savage trusts them, and the educating process goes on. Each successive generation is improved and modified. By a process of mysterious evolution the noblest qualities at last unfold themselves, and out of these creatures, brought to the door of the savage by privation and selfishness, you get at last Gelert's hound ready to lay down its life in defending the cradle of its master's child, the sagacious St. Bernard that hunts for lost travellers in the snows of the Alps, and the Scotch collie that breaks its heart over the death of its master, follows the coffin with solemn and unselfish sorrow, and is immortalised by Landseer in his painting of "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner."

And if in the course of a few generations man can develop these fine moral attributes out of the wolfish greed and want that smoulder in the fierce beasts of the forest, cannot God in less than the space of a generation, yea, in the very moment of His magic kiss, develop yet higher qualities out of His own lost children when they are driven by want back to His

door. Do not despise a penitence because it may seem to originate in selfish need. You cannot forecast all the holy and blessed things that will yet come out of that imperfect mood of the soul.

A cynic might make very short work of the little mite of flesh that lies upon a mother's bosom. Would the heart of either mother or father subscribe to the analysis a rigid psychological anatomist might give of the child's life and nature? What is it, he might ask, but an ignoble parasite? It clings to the mother by the same selfish and exacting instinct that leads the beggarly weed to bury itself under the bark and in the very roots of a plant that is nobler than itself. It is a mere arrangement of syphons. Little milk-leech that it is, it makes the most cruel and exorbitant demands upon the care and strength of another. It seems to think, if indeed it is capable of thinking at all, that its infantile patronage will be more than a sufficient recompense for the endless pains it imposes. The anthropologist will call it a "simian," and put it upon the same moral level as the monkey, and distinctly lower than the savage, for some years to come. Its clutch is the clutch of sheer greed and exorbitancy. To be frank, what is it but a conglomeration of tyrannous and insatiable needs? That is something like the formula to which a rigid, unrelenting analysis might reduce the little life. But will that formula content the heart of the mother? Her instincts are mercifully penetrated by the spirit of true prophecy, and her analysis of the elements in that little life is superscientific. She clasps only a little heap of animated selfishness forsooth? Let a mother's indignation answer the impeachment. Her eye can trace the subtler fibres that underlie

these common needs. In the poor dawn of that unpretending life she pictures, and not untruly, a benign providence that will one day requite her care, watch faithfully over her grey hairs, and uphold her drooping strength. In the pranks of "the unreflecting ape" she sees the sign of a coming intelligence that may invent and revolutionise human industries. In the thoughtless and selfish cries, to which she returns unselfish and unwearied answer day and night, she sees the foundation-chords of a sympathy knitting themselves together that shall one day respond to the cries of suffering thousands in glorious and God-like acts of sacrifice. The solid pillars of immortal spiritual grandeur are being slowly planted in the chaos and morass and quicksand of sheer animal need. Her faith is not staggered or destroyed by paradoxes. In insatiable self-seeking she can read the possibility and the promise of a generosity that will one day make the patriot, the martyr, or the white-robed saint who shall stand in direct touch with the fierce white throne of God. The babe may be a great way off from that, and yet, if love begets love, her caresses, her cradle songs and lullabies, and the tireless cherishings of the mother's heart, shall compass the miracle.

The repentance of the thief Jesus Christ welcomed to His Father's Paradise would seem to have been a comparatively poor affair in its first motive and inception. Certain sections of present-day society would be ready to show more respect to the man who "died game," to borrow the phrase of its sporting sets. Our century has not very much faith in penitent thieves and reformed wantons. This poor mean soul was ready to run into any refuge that might chance

to open for the moment. The inspiriting revelries of his former associations had died away. Driven by suffering, desolation, and mighty fear, he was ready to throw himself body and soul into the hands of the first man who would show him any sign of sympathy. He had nothing but the wretchedness in which his crime had landed him as the basis of an appeal. He could not pray to be made "a hired servant" even. He was a thief just beginning to feel what a mistaken policy his life had been, that was all. In human judgment he might seem to be immeasurably inferior to the mocking elder brethren in the long robes and with the white beards who were passing by the cross. Measured by their standard he was "a great way off," far as the far country itself. He could not offer even the dregs of his life, for the dregs were being swiftly poured away. Nailed hands could not spread the table or turn the mill. Transfixed feet could not follow the oxen to the fields. Glazing eyes could not keep unsleeping watch over flocks and herds. The man could offer no service, however small. He was dying with a weight of awful crime upon his conscience. The cries of his old victims may have been echoing in his ears; the ghosts of despoiled travellers or of slaughtered children may have been gliding before the eye of his remorseful fancy. It was a case of sheer, brain-maddening misery. Death itself, like some fierce beast, was already sucking the life-blood out of his veins. He could not come to the threshold. He could only glance to the great black cloud behind which the father was waiting to receive the spirit of his dying son. His penitence was little more than the beseeching look of a hunted soul. He was "a great

way off," but the Father, in the person of His Son, had compassion, and before the sunset, had enthroned him a comrade of the angels.

A sense of want may leave a man selfish if it only take him one stage of the way back to his Father's presence and companionship. When it drives him into the Father's arms and he receives the compassionate kiss, the kiss transmits to his nature some faint impress of the Divine unselfishness. The Talmud speaks of the spirit of Moses being separated from the flesh on Mount Nebo by the kiss of God. The parable before us is meant to teach that the pure spirit of the son was recovered from abysmal lusts and the base selfishness of the flesh by the kiss of Divine Fatherhood. The soul is not noble and unworldly in the first steps of its penitential movement towards home. It is made so by the touch of God's reconciling favour.

If the father had waited till the son had reached a higher level of life before bestowing his pitying, pardoning kiss he would never have greeted him again. The prodigal was reaching the culminating difficulty of his repentance. It was comparatively easy to leave the strange country, for no one was particularly wishful to detain him, and the very face of the country seemed to abjure him by its black desolations to flee. But oh, to pass the threshold, with all the servants' glances turned upon him! That was the crucial difficulty of his return, and if the father had not strengthened him he would have turned faint-hearted and have perished even now.

Some years ago a visit was made in the interests of science to Mount Whitney, the highest peak of the Sierras. The giant peak is approached by way of

a wide, waterless desert, often fatal to caravans of early emigrants to the Pacific coast, and the traces of caravans that perished through thirst are still to be seen. Skeleton teams of horses, the narrator tells us, are still harnessed to the waggon, and skeleton drivers stand waist-deep in sand by their side. And the terrible disasters in the tropical heat sometimes occurred when the snow-fields of Mount Whitney were already in sight, looking to the eye not much larger than pocket-handkerchiefs. Would you have the religious history of the human race present a scene like that? Then carry out men's ideas of the proper times at which prodigals should be met and greeted and forgiven. But those who strive to cross the desert and get back to God are never blasted by thirst and disappointment in sight of the inaccessible snow-fields. No human soul facing Godward, and in sight of the living fountains, ever perished. At the utmost limit of their misery and wretchedness men find the Father comes forth to meet them with the refreshment of His forgiving grace. The Father's kiss and upholding love shall brace you to meet the final difficulties that may yet lie ahead in prosecuting your repentance to its last conclusion. The Father knows where the returning child needs Him most.

And all this is true to the deep evangelical science of a soul's restoration to the Father's love. The priest would have fixed a much longer penance than this. He would have told the lad his sin could not be expiated apart from much fasting and many prayers, and possibly purgatorial pains in the life to come. He must plough many an acre, sweep many a floor, make ready many a meal for the household, and then, after a long tale of years, he might come to win some

passing gleam of the Father's favour. Yes; and the priest by his method would have developed the young reprobate into a Pharisee. Out of this dissolute and rebellious prodigal the father wanted to get a contrite and believing child, and the father kissed him before he had muttered a single syllable of his confession, or breathed forth a solitary prayer for the favour extended to the hired servants on the farm. The son's resolution would have led him to no higher plane of life and feeling than that on which the elder brother stood. The father dare not postpone the recognition till the son had done some little instalment of the work he was fondly planning in his heart. He must needs meet him when he is "a great way off," to purge him from his dreams of self-righteous service, and base his life upon the love of a free forgiveness.

This one sentence of the parable is full of encouragement, but you will observe it does not teach universalism. The father met him when he was a great way off, but he had at least crossed the frontiers of the far-off country. There was a hemisphere in which his father could not possibly view him with complacency. It is true the disciplinary agencies of the far-off country, the want, the solitude, the famine, the degradation, were all adjustments of the Father's benign providence, but the Divine face was impenetrably shrouded then. The Father cannot kiss the cheeks that are being kissed by the wanton. Do not suppose His kiss makes little difference to the destiny of a soul. It means a mighty separation between past and future. Do not presume upon the universal and unending love of God. If you abide in the far-off country He must look down upon you through the eternal shadows of darkness and famine and loss.

On the other hand, if the words of the prodigal, "I will arise," have passed your lips, you may be of good cheer. It is true that after years of struggle towards God you are not only far from realising your ideal of grateful and willing service, but have scarcely begun to realise your conception of what penitence should be. It seems as though you scarcely dare class yourself as a true and proper mourner for sin. But God will see you in your measureless distance, and anticipate your hidden purpose, and breathe blessed oblivion of the bitter days of exile and rebellion. And the goal of our loftiest resolution is immeasurably remote from that to which God would bring us in character and work. Notwithstanding that, God magnifies His kindliness and meets us wherever we are, if our face be homewards. Do not suppose that your penitence must be perfect and profound, that you must weep in a degree commensurate with the evil and demerit of sin, that you must bring forth the complete succession of repentant fruits, and be all that you ought to be before He will accord you any sign of His favour and recognition. God will meet you by the way, and accept at your hands a repentance that may be by no means perfect and complete. Evil, worthless, a mark for scorn, you may be, but if there be a contrite spirit beneath the rags of your destitution, "the broken and contrite heart" shall not be "despised." The eye that is keenest in detecting your shortcomings is quickest also in reading the inarticulate promise of your bleeding and broken heart.

XI.

THE SHRUNKEN SINEW, OR THE OFFSET TO VICTORY.

"Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank."—GEN. xxxii. 32.

MANY centuries ago, possibly long before the dawn of the Christian era, a caravan of Semitic traders passed through the difficult and perilous deserts of Central Asia and found its way to the capital of ancient China. For some reason or other the sojourn of these foreigners in the city was protracted beyond its intended term, and they became at last naturalised on Chinese soil. Dropping their peculiarities of speech and custom, they intermarried with their Chinese neighbours, and became, to all practical intents and purposes, Chinese citizens. The community when last visited by European travellers had dwindled away to a mere handful, but their idolatrous neighbours continued to distinguish them by two peculiarities —they worshipped without images to aid their devotion, and they kept up a somewhat unusual observance in preparing animal food. A particular sinew in the flesh of which they partook was always regarded as

"taboo," and drawn out. Indeed, they were known as the sect that drew out the sinew. In a locality so isolated from the rest of the world as an ancient capital on the Yellow River, this sumptuary law remains to corroborate the substantial historical genuineness of this episode by the brook Jabbok. This incident is guarded against the suspicion of myth and folklore not only by the name given to a watch-tower on the east of Jordan in allusion to this critical event, but by a custom universal as the dispersion of the Jewish race, a custom that commemorates the angel's touch on this night of sharp conflict and victory.

But the incident has a value apart from its evidential significance. A profound spiritual wisdom gleams through this simple incident told in the speech of the young lisping world. The narrative is characterised by graphic realism, no attempt being made to expound its hidden meaning. No exegetical side-light is cast upon this symbolic act to illuminate it. Perhaps language was inadequate, and the heart must be left to do its own interpreting. At any rate there lies here the profound lesson Paul had yet to learn when he had been rapt up to the converse and fellowship of angels and had heard unutterable things.

I. This incident seems to hint *the weakness and unholiness of the flesh before God.* It was in accents of surprise that Jacob exclaimed at sunrise that he had seen the face of God, and that his life was preserved. This expression of wonder that he should still live after such a Divine manifestation implies a tradition, current with his own forefathers at least, that no man could see the face of God and live. Upon that tradition God put the stamp of His own authority

when He refused the prayer of Moses who wished to see the Divine glory.

The tradition was a safeguard against image-worship. If no one could survive the terrible vision of God's face, he who should claim to truly represent God by an outward form would prove himself an impostor in the very attempt. The current belief closed the door against all idolatry.

But more than that, the tradition was a permanent testimony to the holiness as well as to the severe spirituality of the Most High. His very glance would shrivel the flesh stained with sin. At this stage in the religious history of the race the vision of God could only belong to the unspotted heirs of the first Paradise. Guilty flesh must ever shudder in pain before Him.

And yet Jacob's guess was inspired. He had seen God, seen Him in a transient form through which the latent God shone as in a transfiguration.

Was not the vision of the night a parable of the great coming mediation? God was so identified with the messenger as to be scarcely distinguishable from him, and that being so, the old tradition must be vindicated, to the extent at least required by the conditions of this particular instance. The Divine glory reflected in subdued and temperate rays from the face of this celestial Potentate and Plenipotentiary must still assert its awfulness. The flesh must be touched and made to shrivel, to confess its weakness and unholiness before God, to learn its true order and subjection in the economies of the Eternal. When the Angel of the Covenant comes at last to sojourn upon earth the flesh is prostrated before Him. Peter trembles and exclaims, "Depart from me, for I am a

sinful man, O Lord." The flesh can only be purified by the touch of humiliation and pain.

The pangs of dissolution are not occasioned by physical pain only. With them there commingle dumb awe of the supernatural, a fearful knowledge of unfitness for the exacting fellowships of the strange life that is at the door, a sensitive starting back of the flesh before the Most Holy God. The pangs are the touch of the angel's hand heralding victory and daybreak. They announce a presence in the first discernment of which the flesh is overwhelmed by the sense of its own weakness. Saints, through their higher spiritual sensitiveness, sometimes suffer in the last scene of the mortal life more than the sinners, in whose death there are no bands.

II. This incident seems to convey a hint of prophetic significance that *the great moral victory to which the chosen family had been taught to look was to be wrought out by pain.*

We must be careful not to push this thought too far. The Christology of the Old Testament has often been discredited by strained and artificial systems of interpretation. There is no specific and detailed Messianic prophecy here, except so far as a prophecy is contained in the broad principle suggested in this symbolic act, and the blessing supplicated by Jacob connected itself with the name, power, and moral energy and influence of him who was to be afterwards described as the Star out of Jacob. The touch, however, suggested the reflection that the benediction was linked with pain—pain to Jacob himself; pain and persecution to his immediate descendants—pain reaching in the person of his holiest descendant a culminating poignancy only paralleled by its redemptive power.

The patriarchs needed this lesson, especially Jacob, who was the most secular in character of the group. His ideal of blessing had hitherto been that of flocks and herds straggling over miles of sun-shot landscape, tents in which bejewelled children were darting to and fro in their sports like happy birds, a guard of faithful shepherds and household servants about folds and tents, and a long and painless old age stormless as clear starlit winter skies. The touch dissolved his old dreams of worldly happiness. It reminded him that the blessing for which he was interceding must link itself in some mysterious way with pain. Throughout the greater portion of his old age there was the thorn in his own heart, and there was the bitter sojourn of his children in Egypt to which his own migration was the first step. And in the fulness of time there was the persecution of that holier son who was called out of Egypt to his elect service and sacrifice.

The touch imprinted the destiny of suffering upon the chosen seed and its anointed head. It was a dumb intimation of salvation by a cross borne for us; salvation by a cross borne in us. "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." The hand that blesses touches quick sensibilities in the process.

III. The most obvious lesson of this incident is that *our noblest spiritual visions and victories often leave significant pains and disabilities behind them.*

Within recent years a movement has arisen in our midst the watchword of which is that physical blemishes will disappear in exact ratio to our spiritual advancement and perfection. The adherents of this movement—who are just as sincere and well-meaning as they are rash and superficial—preach that health

is the sign of spiritual consummation. They start from a principle, possibly true in the abstract, that it is never God's will we should suffer, and go on to argue that suffering will cease as we rise to higher altitudes of the Divine favour in our life upon earth. Now and again it has fallen to my lot as a minister to visit exemplary Christian people who have been depressed and made to stumble by the asseverations of these misguided zealots, who declare that every physical infirmity is the infliction of an offended God, and that if faith were perfect and character in all its finer spiritual phases without a spot, God would heal.

If such people had met Jacob as the rising sun brought his figure into view, and as he came hirpling down the slopes towards the bed of the Jordan, they would have been bound to point to his infirmity, and to have declared that he had fallen anew under the Divine displeasure. But Jacob, with a face from which all the hardness and cunning had been melted by the benignity of a countenance that had smiled upon him in the midnight, and a soul inhaling the breath of an infinite charity, and an outlook upon the future braced by the memory of unmistakable blessing, could afford to despise such shallow impertinences. This was the crisis of an unparalleled spiritual triumph, and the very infirmity was a token of it.

A principle, the reverse of that enunciated by these good but misguided people, is suggested to us alike by Bible analogies as well as by the current experiences of some of the purest saints of God. Bodily frailties and privations seem sometimes to be developed by the sudden uplifting of our religious life. A spiritual victory comes to us that will possibly

form an epoch when contemplated from another world, and at the very same time some physical capacity begins to falter and to fail, some secret sensibility is provoked to exquisite pain by a mysterious hand that has arrested us in the darkness, the sinews start and shrink and collapse. Wrestling with the unbelief and temptation that fold God's face from us, our spirits succeed in trampling the sinister forces of evil underfoot, and the face of God is seen as never before, but lo! in the rare moment of exaltation some organ or capacity of the natural life is blunted, maimed, disabled. The unknown God has challenged us to converse, and at length lifted upon our soul the splendour of His infinite loveliness, and in His glorious and blessed appearing He touches a delicate and a cherished sense and there comes the humiliation of the physical powers, pain, breakdown, incapacity for service, or at least for service other than that which is a partial martyrdom. Every revelation, however transcendent in its rapture, has its tempered but attendant pain.

The coal from the altar stings and scarifies the prophetic lips it purifies and inspires. The angel's visit to the virgin of Nazareth foreshadowed secret pain and reproach and shame at the same time that it quickened the pulses of high hope and joy within her. Paul's exalted visions when caught up into the third heavens were immediately followed by "a thorn in the flesh," possibly an embarrassment of speech caused by the mighty strain and rush of superhuman emotion. What an inward immolation! The old horizons of vision have been broken up and a new wealth of wonder and loveliness has poured itself into the apostle's awakening faculties,

and now his power of speech has become more constrained than ever, and all hope of touching the great masses has passed away. He must leave to his more fluent and superficial contemporaries who have never been many fathoms beyond the blue of their native skies the task of revolutionising Athenian philosophy, Corinthian commerce, Roman law, if at least eloquence is to count for anything in the process. Natural loss and limitation have come in side by side with supernatural gain.

Or perhaps the touch of pain that links itself with some of our most notable spiritual victories is not directly personal. The mysterious touch upon the sinew in Jacob's thigh made not a few kindred sensibilities to shrink and quiver. The touch was very much like a touch upon his possessions, for it had disabled the protector-in-chief of the wealth that had been gathered in Padan Aran. The skill and endurance shown in the open field, and through the exercise of which he had risen to such considerable prosperity, were unavailing now. The touch was like a touch upon his loved ones. If Esau's menace should be put into execution, and the worst come to the worst, he was helpless. That power of self-defence was gone which might have been used as a last resort should the flight of his children be cut off and himself be brought to bay. Flocks and herds, wives and servants and little ones, nay, life itself, might seem to be threatened by the touch of pain that came to this sinew.

And so God often touches His people in their possessions at the time of their most sacred converse with Himself and their most delightful apprehensions of His grace and favour. The accumulated earn-

ings of years crumble and pass away under His stroke. The sense of security begotten by having the grateful thought that we can wield power in the world, the proud consciousness that we can make men our debtors, all quiver and vanish under the finger of a biting and a fiery providence. Perhaps the dreaded touch seems to aim at what is immeasurably dearer still. The best loved life is not only menaced but maimed, and possibly snatched away. Whilst God has been lifting upon us the light of His face the thrust of consuming pain and disablement has reached some fine secret sensibility. Well, is there not a deep spiritual philosophy underlying these seemingly hostile providences ?

If the gardener is to realise rare blossom and unstinted fruitfulness, by pruning, by disquietment, by occasional starvation, he must check the excess of leafage in the tree. He withers in one sphere that he may produce higher perfection in another.

We can see something like this in the methods by which the highest powers of the mind unfold themselves. God sets Himself to produce a rare imagination, a subtle discernment, an exalted intellectual vision, and so to make ready the man who is to be the chief glory of his century. The child out of whom the wonderful man will come is at first all eye and ear and touch. There is no appreciable inward life of thought. The sap of the young nature's energy runs to leaf in mere perception. The only things of interest in the universe are the things that have colour, weight, form. But just as God sometimes quickens one sense by blunting another, so He must needs quicken the intellect by blunting all the senses together. The eye is no longer restless to see,

the ear alert to gather in sounds, the hand itching to touch. A high intellectual life begins to brood within the soul, and the power of mere sense perception withers before that sublime efflorescence of reason which supersedes it.

And so with the development of spiritual life. The channels into which all the energies of the nature have been accustomed to flow must needs be stopped. Not a few sensibilities are mortified in the process of taking hold upon God and rising to the true vision of His blessedness. As the inward man is renewed to clearer insight and nobler vigour and more vivid spiritual fellowship, some faculty of the outer man will wither and pass away. That our sensibilities should be touched with pain as we increase in this gracious mystery of power with God is a part of the blessing brought to us by the Angel of the Covenant. We wrestle with Him, imploring some pledge of peace, seeking to know His secret name, invoking help against the omens that thicken about us, and the benediction comes linked with a touch of burning pain.

To the question why these pains and physical infirmities should accompany the choicest and most jubilant passages of our religious life and experience many answers may be suggested.

In the forefront of these reasons we must put that which the apostle suggests as the interpretation of his own special affliction : *physical pain and disability are the counteractives of pride and self-exaltation.* Our highest spiritual achievements may very easily tempt us to arrogance and self-esteem, and God equips us with an armour that must needs chafe and fret and subjugate the sensitive flesh. Indeed its very virtue

consists in this unwelcome use to which it lends itself.

Consider what a wonderful victory was that attained in the solemn night-watch by this frail man Jacob, as his supplications blended with the murmur of the Jabbok at the foot of the gorge. Here was a sordid, double-dealing person, with soul warped by greed, the only two redeeming features of whose character were attachment of uncommon ardour to his own household, and tenacious religious hope. He had justly provoked the seen and unseen hostilities that seemed to be arraying themselves for his speedy punishment. He was penitent, let us hope, for the unselfish reason that his sin seemed to involve his own loved ones in its cruel meshes.

In the tent door a form appears, but half-defined against the starlit sky, which to a superstitious mind might seem an omen of coming calamity. Was it the wraith of the doomed Rachel and her children, and did the apparition intimate that with the coming dawn they should perish before the wrath of Esau? The attitude was at least antagonistic. The mysterious visitant wrestles with the lone man on the dark mountain side as though he were come to overthrow and destroy him. With convulsive effort Jacob grips this weird stranger in the tent door, and with tears and supplications, the long night through, seeks to turn aside His wrath and win some word of approval and comfort from His lips. As the night wears on Jacob begins to discern the high spiritual estate and dignity of his visitant, and the hand-to-hand conflict is changed into worship. The antagonist is transformed into a friend, and in the face of the friend Jacob seems to recognise at last the ineff-

able majesty of God. The visitant Himself declares that this prevalency of night-long supplication is prevalency with God, and Jacob reiterates at the opening dawn that it is the face of God he has been privileged to see. The blessing long ago wrested by guile from the lips of his father is confirmed by a holier and more authoritative dictate, confirmed in answer to patient and piteous prayer. To outward seeming he has conquered God. It was after all God who had conquered Jacob, but the saved man perhaps did not grasp this deeper and subtler truth in a moment.

Now what a temptation this might have proved to self-exaltation! Jacob was steeped in the atmosphere of idolatrous tradition. Within his own tents unworthy rites were practised. We know how ecstatic visions that have seized the brains of men saturated with Pagan influences have led to disobedience, presumption, blasphemy, grotesque self-deification. Against a peril of this sort Jacob is guarded by the touch of the angel's hand. This touch shows how helpless Jacob is in the hand of his antagonist. He owes everything to the indulgence of his antagonist and not to superior force. The slightest touch of that power before which he lay concealed awful potency. The shrunken sinew was a life-long monitor against presumption and spiritual pride.

God still touches with humiliating pain the man who wins His noblest gifts and attains to the most exalted fellowship. We can only be blessed in conditions of complete humility, and the touch that withers the sinew lays the foundation of a life-long beatitude.

It is said that the humming-birds in some of the South American forests sip the nectar of flowers with such avidity and forgetfulness that they become quite intoxicated and fall an easy prey to their adversaries. And but for the thorn that makes us watchful, but for the spur of physical pain and infirmity, but for the drop of earthly tribulation that God puts into our cup we might become so hilarious with spiritual ecstasy as to fall an easy prey to pride and sin. We need to be kept sober by the weight of providential crosses, constitutional disabilities that often grow apace as our sense of God's love enlarges, the humiliating tokens that remind us we are forgiven men and not unsinning angels, and must never forget our utter dependence upon God. God's tenderest and most bountiful dealings with us are interleaved and annotated with severities that seem to say, "Be not high-minded, but fear."

The touching of the sinew led on through humility to *a complete and undivided faith.* Apart from this afflictive act Jacob would never have had the persuasive faith to move the angel at midnight and melt his alienated brother at the dawn. In this apparently hostile movement the angel showed himself the helper of that very faith which was the condition of spiritual conquest. The touch, it will be noted, came in the thick of the struggle, and whilst the natural vehemence of Jacob was asserting itself, apart from the subtler spiritual forces that arose within his life and gave the effectual climax to his supplications. The physical excitement was superseded by a more potent and penetrating temper of appeal, the delicate but invincible force of a confidence that is strong to cling through its very helplessness. The touch that

disabled the flesh enabled the spirit with rare, fresh strength. But for this prostrating act the supplanter would never have conquered in his prayer. He was now cast upon the compassion of the angel, and content to address himself to that, and to that alone. This plaintive yet tenacious trustfulness clothed his pleading with new virtue and efficacy.

And when the new day came this infirmity guarded the faith that had so wonderfully thriven in the darkness. Just as in the military hospital you may sometimes see the crippled soldier standing as guard and nurse over his weak comrades and pouring nourishment into their lips ; so this physical incapacity, this arrested force of muscle and movement, this maimed function in the natural life, stood guard over the faith that was coming back to Jacob after the delirium of his worldliness and ministered strength through all the channels of the better life that was reviving within him. Had Jacob gone forth hale and lusty from the conflict he might not have rested so implicitly on the pledge of blessing from the angel's lips. Now and again he would have been tempted to think of his powers of flight, would have planned some strategy of defence to check the threatened attack. But power of defence and flight alike were gone, and he was cast on the promise of the Covenant Angel and his power to hold the resentments of Esau in restraint.

When you halt upon your thigh in the hot sun, and the sinews seem to shrink, do not bewail your incurable infirmities. Let your heart be calm and your trust unbroken. Remember every physical ill with which God afflicts you is the stepping-stone to a more majestic faith and a princelier spiritual dignity. The

afflicting touch is your palladium against apostasy and unbelief.

And again, God seems to mingle pains and infirmities with our spiritual victories and exaltations so that we may have some *term of contrast by which to judge the worth of* our noblest gains. If our wrestling has been real, and our exaltation is truly Divine, we shall be able to make light of the disabilities that press upon the flesh only. We shall not mourn over scars or be ever groaning over the twinges of old wounds if they are the mementoes of moral and religious conquests and witness of our advancement in the kingdom of God. These losses and mortifications pertain to our little life of dreams and illusions, and the experiences with which they are identified belong to a realm that outlasts all time.

The mountain streams of a certain district in Central Asia are charged after heavy rains with little diamonds, and the natives of the country are accustomed to put on straw sandals and wade in the streams. The little diamonds are caught by their rough edges in the plaits of the sandals, and the sandals are then burned and the little points of ethereal ised sunlight are picked up out of the ashes. Now the man tempted to perpetual grumbling at the waste of shoes would be quite unworthy of the treasures gathered by the operation. No possessor of common sense would count one or a hundred pairs of grass sandals against these little bits of choice cherished stone.

And if we weigh the matchless blessing received from the Covenant Angel against the trifling losses and disabilities that connect themselves with our advancement in Divine things, we are unworthy of

our royal enrichment. What matter our losses and limitations if the glory of the Divine face is lifted upon us and linger about our lives to the end? Let us learn rather "to glory in our infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us." If physical strength wither under the angel's touch, if earthly substance be consumed by his breath, if the flesh itself turn to dust, the price should be gladly paid, be it only that His unseen presence attend us through the vicissitudes of our pilgrimage, and the ever-blessed God makes Himself our eternal portion and inheritance.

This subject must not be made into *a gospel of flattery and unctuous consolation for every sufferer.* The solace with which this incident is fraught is for those whose pains and disabilities bear the mark of the inevitable about them. Some persons speak piously of their piercing pangs and forget that many of those pangs have been the direct issue of their own folly rather than the creation of God's mysterious touch upon their lives. The preacher must beware of soothing such sufferers by smooth and rosy optimisms. Every throb and quiver of the sensitive flesh calls for my sympathy, but every throb and quiver does not lend itself to this peculiar and sacred interpretation. There are agonies which are entirely the result of folly, worldliness, headstrong transgression. A loneliness overshadows some lives that is self-incurred. By frigidity, arrogant cynicism, stoical independence many a man isolates himself from the tenderness of friendship. Domestic griefs and burdens and estrangements may sometimes be traced back to lapses of wisdom, meekness, self-restraint, patience, forgiveness. The business reverses that

engulf a man and foreclose all after-prosperity have sometimes issued only from luxurious and extravagant conceptions of life and foolhardy speculation, and not from what the old English law so reverently terms "acts of God." Such sorrows are self-mutilations, and indicate tempers of malingering. Like the beggar's wounds, they are inflicted and kept open by the pseudo-martyr's own hands. Beware of obscuring the true issue and falling into cant. These witherings and quiverings of the sensibilities have not come by the touch of the high angel's hand. Forgiveness is extended to you, but do not magnify these personal distresses and think of them as the scars of a sacred conflict. It is only in the inevitable that you must recognise the direct touch of God. For the pains that are immediately related to moral errors you need the cleansing touch that was laid upon the leper—a touch less majestic and honourable than the touch that consecrates to supreme blessing and victory through pain.

Possibly my words may reach some who have been so prostrated by God's providential hand that they have forgotten the exhortation that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." I know of no more pathetic thing in human life than the angel's touch disjoined from Israel's triumph. The thickening cares and infirmities and privations of old age sometimes seem to sink religious life and struggle into lassitude and despair. The patriarch halts upon his thigh as he goes down the hill of life, but it is not Peniel he has just left. No changed name reminds him of the grace into which he has risen by the struggles of the night. The transient strife did not pass into clear triumph and the unclouded grandeur of holy vision.

The morning breaks in storm, shedding no balm from its quiet bosom upon the landscape, putting no crowns of light upon the hill-tops of the promised land across the river. The darkness was a leaden nightmare; the dawn is just as woful: within is pain, without are menace and desolation. How can we best sketch the story of such a life? "And he was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him he touched the hollow of his thigh." At that point down the curtain falls, and the rest of the life is a moan rather than a litany, surging at last into pæans and doxologies. The fine picture in Genesis is cut right in two. The day that breaks is one in which "the strong men bow themselves, and the keepers of the house tremble, and the daughters of music are brought low, and those that look out of the windows are darkened." Man of the strained and trembling sensibilities, remember it is the angel of benediction whose touch has laid nature low. God means every pain to spur into struggle which shall issue in daybreak and vision and the matchless and transporting victories of faith and love. And if that is not the result, your wavering and fainthearted-ness have turned pain into a calamity and thwarted the purpose of the angel who strives with you against yourself and seeks to remove whatever would ban or becloud your after-destiny. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

If the blessing has been pronounced let pain be forgotten in the glad retrospect of conquest. It is ignoble to look wofully at your scars and make little of the new life breathed into you by the angel of the covenant. Be more like the apostles, who rejoiced

that they were "accounted worthy, not only to believe on Jesus Christ, but to suffer for His name." It is a culminating honour to share Christ's pain. The pierced hand cannot touch an elect soul without making that soul taste in some degree the suffering of the hand that once redeemed it. Rejoice in the very humiliations that advance you to more majestic service. With the angel's benediction surging and swelling like a strain of oft-repeated music through his soul, even the once worldly Jacob could forget the loss of physical ease and the withering up of physical power. The very halt of pain was a quiet moment in which he heard again the glad melody of love brought by the angel from his home in heaven and poured forth through his gracious lips, ere He, the Bright and Morning Star, vanished, like other fading stars, to His native skies at dawn.

Do not distrust the victories of others because of their infirmities. Honour spiritual achievement, and remember that in the kingdom of grace, victory and physical, aye, and now and again intellectual weakness as you measure things, go hand in hand. Do not judge men by the old Pagan standards of perfection. We belong to a higher realm than that of Nature. There are prevailing Israels whose religious exploits you despise because of blemishes that attach to them; it may be in some cases through the very sacredness of their history. Their language halts, their logic stumbles, their judgments are narrow, superficial, lopsided. Never despise God's poor saints. Their very infirmities should be sacred, for they may be imprints of God's finger. In the end religion is bound to develop reason, but at times the rush of religious life and

emotion may be such that the intellectual faculties are momentarily stunned. We cannot reason, for the flesh is too weak in God's presence. Let all religious vision and victory be sacred to you. The insight that demands our veneration and the outward humiliation that solicits our sympathy may be strangely mingled.

XII.

QUIET WAITING FOR GOD.

"The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."—LAM. iii. 25, 26.

THE salvation for which it is good to wait is that which frees us from the pain and privation, the stress and discipline of present circumstance. It can never be good for a man to wait for his salvation from the power of passion and self and sin. Whilst that tarries, a man only adds to the guilt and dishonour of the past, and brings himself more terribly under God's touch of fire. It is always the man who keeps himself waiting for this inward salvation which is needful to protect character from jeopardy and hastening deterioration, never the gracious God. God, indeed, would be an accessory to human guilt, if His decree required us to tarry a single breath for all the grace and power of inward salvation. Everything necessary to enable a man to rise to his own highest sense of what God has called him to be, God must give with a swiftness that outstrips the wings of the morning.

There are, however, many benefits correlated to our salvation, which we do not receive in the first

moments of the new life, and which are withheld by the very hand that paid its own incalculable ransom of love for us. It was for an outward salvation, consisting largely in such benefits as these, that the prophet and his fellow-sufferers were waiting in sweet and contented dependence upon God. They of course knew that the favour of God was already lighting again upon His prostrate and contrite people, but they wanted more than this. Oh, how they longed to see the successive incursions of hostile armies turned aside, and the heathen usurper dislodged from his place in the palace and the judgment hall, and breached cities made strong again, and wide acres of ruin replaced by stately homes, and the temple tower majestically to the clouds once more, the centre of a holy and inviolable national life. But for these political fruits of salvation, for these secondary tokens of God's returning favour, these last pledges of His complacency, they had to wait, and they were quite content to wait, if the glory of God's reconciled face would stream down upon them through all the intervening days.

Their example may well instruct us. We are often impatient to escape all the incidental pains, disablements, and humiliations of an unfaithful past. It is not enough to be inwardly comforted, but we seem to think if God's reconciling favour is worth anything at all, He ought to make us as free from every phase of affliction as though we had left the troubled planet behind us for ever, give us friends and companions as gracious and distinguished as the angels, and put the crown on our heads in the very moment His anger is turned from us. But God's methods are not ours, and we find that there are pains and humi-

liations, stripes and sore chastisements from which we cannot be saved at once. A strong and inscrutable rule is over us which has determined that we must wait, and it will be our blessedness to trustfully welcome the decree.

It is not all who seem to be waiting for this outward salvation who have a valid title to the high beatitude spoken of by the prophet. Very promiscuous types of people affect this attitude of devout expectancy and claim to be possessing their souls in quiet patience till some delivering act of Divine power comes.

At times we meet with men who make *a stagnant and slumberous temper of hopefulness* the substitute for that practical high-minded conduct that would soon take them out of their straits and perils. Their specious optimism blinds them to the duty of the hour. They wait in a spirit of perfectly unwarranted resignation and expectancy for God to save them from the consequences of unwept and unamended transgression. They wait—oh, how submissively!—for God to reverse the law of ten thousand years and screen them from the penalties attaching to lethargy. Some door, they are ever dreaming, will be opened to them by the hand of an indulgent Providence, and they will find themselves in a new world. When we see such people loitering about the highways of commercial, municipal, parliamentary, diplomatic life, expecting the happy chance may come any hour, we call them, rather contemptuously, "waiters upon Providence." If such characters had flourished in the prophet's time I question whether he would have looked upon them as pre-eminently happy. Providence is not at all likely to do much for these unless in

the way of birching, sharp reprimand, and semi-starvation.

Inordinate ambition will sometimes lead a man to take upon himself unreasonable risks in business. Events go contrary to his anticipations, and a time comes when he ought to save himself by an act of moral courage and renunciation. But the proud, cowardly man suffers bad to pass into worse, and lives on the credit of honest people, whilst he piously turns his eyes to God to work a miracle which will rescue him from his embarrassments. He is waiting till some rock in the desert is smitten and streams of silver flow forth to himself and his thirsty clients and creditors. The man has entered upon a wicked game of "brag," and he expects God to finance him in his play by a series of providential interpositions.

Scheming and unscrupulous people have led another man into *a path full of commercial pitfalls.* God and the schoolmaster have done their best to protect him from infatuation and disaster, the one endowing him with a sense he has been too lazy to cultivate and apply, and the other drilling him in rules of arithmetic he has been too dreamy to work quietly out, and so he goes on shutting his eyes as he walks in treacherous paths, and expecting that God will interpose to save him, rather than striving to save himself from the temporary consequences of his folly and preoccupation as far as that may still be possible. The only way by which God can save him in the larger significance of the term is to let him feel unsheltered all the disastrous effects of his own fatuous lethargy.

Not infrequently a man brings himself into a position that cruelly chafes and vexes his sensi-

bilities by *inordinate conceit*, *bad temper*, or a loose-running and shrewish tongue, and then expects God to come down and lift him out of the contempt, dishonour, and unpopularity which invest him, whilst God means the man to redeem himself from these conditions by a self-abasement that shall be a wholesome and life-long lesson to him. He has wantonly prodded a wasp's nest with his walking stick or kicked over a swarming beehive, and, pious soul that he is, he expects the God who shut the mouths of Daniel's lions to squeeze the stings out of the swarms of exasperated insects that are buzzing in battle array around him.

Or a man prays that God would bring those who are His own pure servants to the head of our social and municipal life, and call patriots and philanthropists of unimpeachable righteousness and disinterested spirit into our cabinets, and he is too timid or too lazy to openly work for these ends, or if he is drawn into the strife, his influence and his vote just pair off against his prayers and build up the rule of the Jockey and Pelican clubs and the greed and tyranny of the licensed victuallers. All these types are in the worst possible sense "waiters upon Providence" who will get little for their pains but His frown, His rod, and if finally intractable, His hot thunderbolts.

The word in all such cases is *go and do*. Above all things do not wait and pray and pray and wait. You can save yourself, and have no need to hope and wait for the salvation of God, which after all is but an unregenerate euphemism for shuffling your own bad business upon His shoulders, whilst it is yet in your own power to make it a little less bad. God will not consent to be your proxy whilst you sit

down at home and dream. It is only when we find ourselves in the grip of the inevitable and have no power to help ourselves—only when we have used our own best endeavour and find ourselves hemmed in by the insurmountable—it is only when after following consistent courses of obedience to God and consideration for the rights and interests of others, we find the problem still outgrows our power to grapple with it; it is only then we are justified in a tranquil and untroubled waiting for God's delivering hand. "Stand still and see the salvation of God" is a word that fits into the rare emergencies of our lives, and has Divine authority behind it when we are walking in God's clearly prescribed paths. If we come to God as mere parasites and hangers-on and camp-followers, we shall get a very meagre pittance for our waiting and hoping. It is just as far as we sustain the character of diligent, true-hearted, and faithful servants, that we shall find it "good for a man to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

God sometimes keeps us waiting for deliverance from stress and pain and outward peril, so that we may have an undistracted meantime of *opportunity in which to weigh the worth of that inward salvation which has already come to us*, and so attached us to God that we can hope and quietly wait. At the outset we are not sufficiently awake to estimate the favour even then lavished upon us, and we have to wait for the inferior and more feverishly coveted half of our salvation, so that we may be trained to a due sense of the proportion of things. Some flowers must be placed apart or against a background of leaf and fern, if the eye is to catch their fairy pencillings and take in their delicious hues. They would be lost

in the blaze of a gaudy bouquet. It is only just to isolate them from more pretentious but less perfect rivals. A picture gallery crowded with masterpieces of every school sometimes perplexes the visitors who go home dizzy, distracted, forgetful through the very embarrassment of riches. Their dreams have been gigantic kaleidoscopes in which new and unmeaning pageants of colour have ever been reforming themselves. The aspirant to clear artistic knowledge resolves that he will go next day and sit for hours before some one picture and ignore the rest. A separate chamber or saloon is sometimes provided for the picture or the statue entitled to concentrated study, and the work of imperial genius gains when there is no competing background of minor subjects. And God can sometimes only make us see the high values of His grace and inward salvation by setting them forth against the grey background of our present adversity. If He were to add to the blessing of salvation all the temporal benefits we so plaintively solicit in our prayers, He would baffle us in our task of computing the measures of the mercy already shown in blotting out our sin.

A Scotch theologian once said that inasmuch as salvation was by the sovereign grace of God alone and not by works, it had always been a mystery to him why God had left His people in the struggle and turmoil of an evil world, and had not glorified them in immediate connection with the act by which He justified them. It seems to me that the abstract difficulty of that estimable divine would have been dispelled if his speculative theology had been qualified by a little knowledge of human nature, as it is even under the conditions of the new life. Had

God brought us into a better universe forthwith, without first compelling us to learn the worth of His purely spiritual gifts through the term of long and quiet waiting, He would have been simply luring us into a new phase of worldliness, and we might never have come to a due sense of the privilege bestowed upon us in turning aside our condemnation, and bringing us on to speaking terms with Himself.

Imagine that a group of divers band themselves together to recover the chests of treasure from some ship lost a century ago. They know there was silver on board, but have never heard that there were likewise gold and precious stones. Silver, moreover, is the currency of the country off whose shores the lost vessel lies. Now if the silver is on the upper deck, and they discover that first they will conclude that they have possessed themselves of all the treasure sunken there, and making off at once to the mainland where the currency is silver, they will eat and drink and live merrily on the inferior instalment recovered. It would be a misfortune to them to find the cheaper metal first. But if the unknown gold is stored on the upper deck, they will not only possess themselves of it, but in due time will likewise go on to recover the silver in specific quest of which they came. The getting at once of what is less noble will thwart them in the attainment of higher treasure.

In the economies through which God answers prayer and rewards search, there is a wise stratification and ordering of His precious things which contributes to our widest and most enduring enrichment. If God had put temporal salvation in the forefront of all His economies, we might possibly have continued blind to that inward salvation which

is above gold and rubies. God keeps us waiting for secondary mercies so that we may wake up to the essential values we are already touching, and the time of waiting is very often just the time needed to train us in God's arithmetic of spiritual things.

By the wisdom and discernment that come to us through a long and quiet waiting, *we fit ourselves for a continued possession of God's gifts at last.* To go back for a moment to the times of the prophet; if sudden pestilence had cut off the invaders of the Holy Land one and all, if ruined cities had been built up again by the magic of unseen hands, if desolated fields and vineyards had blossomed once more without interval of neglect and decay, much needful discipline would have been missed, and the blessings of this premature restoration might have been unstable as a dream. The oppression of the tyrant would have been a brief nightmare, the stern lesson of which could not have reached down to the deepest springs of noonday thought and action. And certainly no expectation of a Messiah would have been stubbornly cherished from age to age, if every dream and hope had been fulfilled at once and the national lot left nothing more to be desired. By a premature deliverance from the effect of the first apostasy, God would simply have been preparing His people for a deeper and a more disastrous fall into ruin and death. He would have been lifting them out of one fire and making them taste the sweets of a painless moment before dropping them into another. It was better for them to wait in privation and abasement with the pledge of God's returning favour in their hearts, and the promise of redemption accomplished only on its spiritual side. The afflictions that still darkened

their land were making them ready for a more complete and enduring experience of God's favour.

And for our full redemption from some of the miseries at least begotten by sin it is well to wait. The disciplinary interval prepares us to receive, through the kindness of God our Saviour, riches that are not quite so prone to make to themselves wings and fly away. If a man is to have wealth, it is always a misfortune for him to pick it up too easily. He who gathers it in nuggets is very apt to fling it away in nuggets likewise. In the slow process of getting, he learns how to use it wisely and thoughtfully. Could a law be enacted that no man should come into his estates till he was forty there would be fewer fortunes squandered. The grandest windfall that could come to some of our gilded fools would be a long minority. By bidding us wait, God teaches the value of His gifts and qualifies us to receive at last cumulative bounty from His kingly hands. That is never duly prized which comes in the very moment we ask it. God wants us to enjoy His gifts for ever, and by the long waiting at His gates prepares us for an indefectible guardianship of the true riches.

A higher faith is evoked and verified by this patient waiting to which God can give at last a more lavish and loving response. To learn the habit of patient, perfect, undaunted faith is better for us than to acquire at once the brightest boon it is within the power of an Almighty Benefactor to bestow. Education is more than knowledge. It would be a barren thing if we could get knowledge without effort. We should not care to have it fed into us as water is fed into the locomotive at some wayside tank. Those to whom the acquisition of knowledge is extra-

ordinarily easy, very rarely, if ever, prove themselves great thinkers. The discipline to the faculties in the long processes of education is a thing of more importance than the mere accumulation of facts that may have a certain commercial or professional value. And in the same way the establishment of lofty tempers and habits of faith within us by quiet and restful waiting for God, enriches us immeasurably more than the most imperial treasure to which our pleading faith can look with solicitation. The earth sometimes spoils human character by its excessive bounty. It yields its fruits so freely that industry and resource have little or no sphere for honourable exercise, and so in the lap of Nature's amplest kindness you have a type of life that is pampered into imbecility and degradation. An over-fertile soil often grows very barren brains. And it would be quite possible for God to demoralise us by answering our self-interested prayers too freely and hastily. His help and bounty might flow out to us with such unceasing affluence, in ways we have dictated, that there would be no call for an enduring faith in us. Some good people talk very readily about their answered prayers. To a reflecting mind rightly exercised by its own prayers, there will be as much occasion for gratitude in what seem from our standpoint unanswered prayers, or prayers at least answered in God's ways and not in ours. It is a nobler and a more recompenseful thing to acquire a trustful temper of patience and contentment, to tarry for God in the sweet assurance that He cannot fail us and that He will accept our silent waiting as a holy tribute and ministry to His name, than to receive at once the princeliest treasure the angels' fatherland could yield us. One of the

sweetest things in life is not to get our own wills swiftly and completely done, but to hope and quietly wait for God. Such an attitude is unspeakably contenting to meek and upright souls, and God always justifies and crowns with unknown distinctions the patience of His people.

By this habit of quiet waiting into which God's delays almost force us, we rise into more *sacred, blessed, and informing intimacy* with God than if answers rushed down upon us in swarms like November meteor showers. Dr. Johnson remembered being carried as a child into Queen Anne's presence to be touched for "king's evil." But even if royal touch had in that case as much efficacy as popular superstition attributed to it, and the future lexicographer had found himself delivered from his painful affection, such a visit would scarcely have qualified him to write a book entitled "Personal Reminiscences of Queen Anne." The least observant page holding up the train, the butterfly lady-in-waiting hovering about her movements day by day, would be indefinitely better qualified for the task and be able to put before us ampler and more readable material. Those called to tarry long in God's courts are more highly favoured than those dismissed at once with whatever they ask. It is better to see God's face in continued vision and apocalypse, than to find immediate deliverance from all the sorrow and disease of life.

Perhaps once or twice in the past you have met with a man it was worth a fortune to know. An hour's talk with him was an education of no mean order, and made you a new being. His influence seemed to multiply all the mystic forces of your

vitality, and brought achievements within the easy compass of your power of which you had not hitherto dreamed. And this discovery of his genius and moral power, and through that of the more capable self hidden within you, came by a detention at his house or office you might have been disposed to resent. The promise of some favour you had gone to ask could not be given forthwith, and in the interval conversation sprang up that created an epoch. If in a moment you had got that which you had gone to ask, you would have missed the highest privilege of your life. You are always glad of any check in your plans, any detention even on the busiest day, any temporary disappointment of your best hopes and wishes that will give the high occasion of speech and intercourse with such an one. And if you could judge such things aright at once, you would possibly find that the highest privilege in your spiritual life arises through some delay that has barred for the moment the answer to your supplications. The holding back of that which we covet compels us to abide before God's face, and we gain more by that than by God's most lavish giving. Our very detention there will enlarge our knowledge of God, and to know Him is the life and blessedness of angels. It is their chief distinction to stand in His presence rather than to receive His gifts. Men are very prone in their prayers to accept God's gifts and go away and forget all about the Giver. They have little higher idea of Him than have our children of the automatic confectionery distributors at the railway stations. The perfect universe is one in which the prayer is dropped in and the toothsome blessing is shot out forthwith. But God is a thousand-

fold more than His highest gifts, and if all men's prayers could be thrown into one and answered in a single outburst of generosity, the gift would be beggarly beside that which God imparts when He comes to dwell within me day by day and manifest His incomparable grace and power to my soul.

Do not let us suppose we can fully know God, or indeed know Him in any degree, by hasty methods and cursory processes. I have seen personally-conducted tourists go through one of the most interesting churches in Rome in five minutes. Twenty of them had passed by every picture and marble and antiquity in that comparatively short space of time, and were standing on the western steps ready to be bowled off to the next place. That is sacrilege. And the thoughtless rush before God, in which we expect to get all we covet, and away again, is worse than sacrilege. The unapproachably glorious cannot be known in the twinkling of an eye. One of Ruskin's pupils once said to him, "The instant I entered the gallery at Florence I knew what you meant by the supremacy of Boticelli." "In an instant did you?" was the somewhat withering reply. "It took me twenty years to find it out." If we wait before God for a lifetime we shall only just begin to feel His enchantments. He is not blessed whose petty, short-lived wants are met at once, but he who is compelled to tarry long before God.

We are all familiar with the feats of instantaneous photography. The swiftest animal has been caught in movement, and the express train has yielded up an unblurred reflection, and a few weeks ago a bullet was successfully depicted in its flight from the rifle. But you cannot get a picture of the Infinite in that

way, and you would not wish to if it were possible. The vision Moses saw in the cleft of the rock cannot be absorbed into the soul in moments that daze us with the very swiftness of their flight.

Some scenery is so beautiful that it would be torture to be rushed through it. We want to saunter at the slowest possible speed through its successive panoramas, and to stand at intervals and muse for hours. In both nature and art there are things that must be allowed to grow upon us. Many people fail to feel the influence of Niagara at the first visit. The senses do not waken to its forces and scale themselves to its proportions in an hour. The visitor needs to see it in the sunrise and to see it in the sunset, to watch it from the Canadian and to watch it from the American side, to see it from the rapids and to see it from the whirlpools, to stand above it and to stand beneath it, to listen to the witchery of its roar at all hours of the day and night, till every nerve seems magnetised and every fibre tense and tremulous with sensations that are too large for it. Only then are its supreme qualities felt and recognised.

And God must keep us long in His presence if we are to see His beauty and feel the transport of His power. You cannot know God by brief attendances in His presence. Seraphs have gazed for millenniums and are gazing still. Do not assume you can learn in a moment what it has taken them epochs to contemplate and comprehend. God will not satisfy every temporal aspiration at once. He loves you too much for that. He wishes to keep you tarrying about His feet, learning more and more, through quiet waiting, of the secret of His infinite life, gaining for yourself in ever-growing knowledge

of His person and presence and ways a benediction which is essential, absolute, age-long.

Nature confronts us with enigmas which make a large demand upon our patient and untroubled trust. Men who claim to be teachers of their generation parade before us a series of facts the explanation of which is by no means obvious at once, and argue that the so-called First Cause of the Universe has no predetermined ends. If it has, they are quite unworthy of the attributes with which theology has clothed the great shaping force of all things, and shameful blunders characterise the attempt to bring about those ends. "Nature," says a recent writer, "makes a thousand shots to one hit." Countless variations occur that pass away and give rise to no advantage in the life of either the individual or the species. Out of a swarm of unresting modifications only one turns out at last by some off-chance to be practically useful. There can be no God, or what is worse still, the force behind Nature is reckless of the welfare of its organic creations.

Perhaps we are not yet near the solution of these enigmas. It may be the facts have not been rigidly sifted or brought from a sufficiently wide field, and we are not yet ripe for the grand induction. By all means let us ascertain the true character of these problems and grapple manfully with the solid facts that confront us; and if the glorious unravelment does not come at once let us be content to hope and quietly wait. Beware of premature conclusions; for the last word of science has not yet been spoken, and may not be spoken for generations. If evolution is continuous, as the scientist affirms, God's work is unfinished, and we cannot expect to have a complete

philosophy of it at present. It is unfair to pass judgment upon the unfinished work of a fellow mortal whose ideas we can fathom; how much more unfair to pass judgment upon that work of infinite mind which may be centuries of millenniums from its goal, and which is full of complex interdependencies that make man's best work child's play in comparison! You do not pronounce verdict upon the time-keeping qualities of a half-finished watch, or the merit of a picture the ground-colours of which only have been painted in, or dogmatise upon the flavour of universal game and poultry because an addled egg has found its way to your breakfast-table. Do not measure God by an unfinished universe, or seek to gauge His character and resource by the abortions of a history that is so often synonymous with chaotic ferment and bloody war. The tiger jungle is not Eden past or to be; the ferocious greed of industrial strife is not millennial peace and perfection; the revived Cæsarisms which are rampant on the planet are not forecasts of the Messianic reign that is at hand. The end of the drama is yet very far off. Do not cut knots or grow rash and bitter and unbelieving, but have the high and undaunted confidence that God will make His creation worthy of Himself. Your faith at least will be tried for a few short years only, and this is an ordeal of fire that will refine and glorify it. In the meantime let it not be forgotten that for the man of science and those who sympathise with his high pursuits, there must be a patience of faith running parallel with the patience of research. This is the discipline appointed to come into his life as much as into the lives of those called to do or to suffer much. It will be just as good for

his science as for his religion if he can be brought to refrain from throwing his newest accumulations of material into theories that will have to be pulled to pieces again. Unbelief is only a phase of impatience. Let us keep ourselves from mental panic, for that is the close ally of atheism. In the higher realms of intellectual life and activity it is good for men to remember this benediction pronounced upon those who seek and hope and quietly wait.

We may be beset in an age of peace and security by *secret adversaries*, and have to wait in patient and untroubled hope for God's salvation out of their hands. We are perhaps apt to think that the cries of God's persecuted people in the past have no relevance for us to-day. It is quite a mistake. The bulls of Bashan who gaped upon the suffering Psalmist have given place to creatures no less ferocious who make havoc of investments which are the life-blood of widows and orphans and helpless invalids. The enemies who came upon the Psalmist to eat up his flesh have given place to wolfish "rings" that are formed to absorb everything that makes the flesh and clothes the family of the smaller dealers—cotton rings, wheat rings, copper rings, cheese rings. There is just as much fighting going on—in bloodless ways, of course—as in the border countries a couple of centuries ago. Classes muster in battle against each other. The unionist workman looks upon himself and his comrade as trodden under the heel of oppression, and is always ready to strike a blow at the great manufacturer and his kind. The manufacturer regards the workman as the insatiable enemy of those above him and the spoiler of the nation's trade, and each side looks upon its own cause as that

of righteousness, and is often blind to the just aims of that opposed to it. And, apart from these colossal conflicts of interest, strife springs up every day in the path of a good and faithful man. By the endeavour to condemn and redress a wrong, by lifting up a voice of protest against the corruption of rulers, by denouncing national iniquities and denying the dogma of cabinet impeccability, by defiance of the dishonourable traditions of a trade, by such complete earnestness as Christ would approve and modern society call fanatical, the servant of God is sure to make for himself fierce and cruel adversaries. Grievous wounds have to be borne, and misrepresentations, not infrequently flavoured with extreme piety, have to be endured. Of course nobody would trouble us if we would "let sleeping dogs lie," but then we cannot leave wrong alone and keep God for our friend. The Lord no longer seems to be the Lord of Hosts. We should like Him to overwhelm a few of the Pharaohs of this last decade of the nineteenth century ; for to our thinking they deserve it quite as much as the hard persecuting despot of the Nile. Well, is it not better that the Church should be allowed to verify her faith in God and right for years rather than be delivered at once, especially if we enter into that longsuffering of the Lord with our adversaries which may prove their salvation and will certainly prove a fuller salvation to us who catch and reflect His gentleness ? Whilst we have the faith that can wait for years God will never deny us the smile of His approval, and the years so brightened will not seem weary or over-long.

Sometimes we may be called to wait for *deliverance from the straitened conditions of service.* Our plans

outrun and out-tower our opportunities. Faculties stir within us for the due exercise of which the proper occasion is not yet come. In our central consciousness latent spiritual forces seem to have conceived themselves that are restless for indefinite expansion. Well, the forces will not evaporate through the processes of quiet and trustful waiting. Remember Christ's thirty years of humble self-suppression in the cottage, the school, the workshop, the synagogue of Nazareth; and that too with such an urgent and passion-charged destiny to impel Him into movement. Had that part of His life been shortened He might have missed in the dark days of conflict that were before Him much of the radiance of the Father's face, gracious preparations and equipments for His incomparable task, many a recollection needed to sustain in His mysterious and blood-marked struggle and passion, inspiring accents of witness and approval from the highest heaven. Not a single hour from the tale of the thirty years' waiting could have been spared. Possess your souls in patience. Never attempt to force success. Do not drive a premature pathway for yourself through opposing hindrances before the voice of God calls. Wait for God to go before you and light up the succeeding stages of your pilgrimage. Tarry for His cloud to arise and go like a beckoning standard before you, or your campaign may be suicide. The success in connection with which we await His sovereign will will be as the light of seven days. Never challenge the reproach addressed to fussy, purblind, shallow minds, "Your time is always ready."

God asks from many an agonised servant of His a term of quiet and *patient waiting before the last sleep*

of release shall come. It may be your temptation, when the crisis of disease and struggle overtakes you, to long for a swift escape from infirmity, solitude, disappointment, physical pain, unfitness for further service. Those new views of natural law which exclude Providence from the realm of physical disease, it is to be feared, favour the growing tendency to suicide, and may sometimes present themselves as a temptation to many who know the true power of godliness. It is the inevitable in the progress of the disease, and God has little to do with it. If such a thought ever masters you, then adieu to that supreme benediction which is the crown of quiet and hopeful waiting. Through the ordeal that makes you a helpless child again, grace will come which will open your vision to a strange sun at the midnight of your exodus from the world. God will look upon the patience of hope proved in the sharp rending of the flesh with a radiant complacency withheld, it may be, from the most heroic ministries of your active life. You can render by your unmurmuring submission and much-tested faith a tribute for which you will never be asked again in the long process of your immortal years. Do not want to be hurrying out into the darkness to meet your returning Lord. Wait in serene deliberation till He knocks, and then the Lord will gird Himself and serve you. If you thus wait there will be only a shred of the far-off night seen through the open door upon the sky-line, for the Bridegroom will bring the day-dawn with Him.

And we all wait—some of us more patiently than others—for *Christ's coming again.* Thoughtless Christians, sick of the world's wickedness, and despairing

of the competence of the Church to win the world to Christ's ways, are ever saying He must be very near. They work themselves into high frenzies and fevers and prophesy strange things within weeks or months, or before the end of the next century at most. That is not waiting in quiet hope. Of all the good people in this world of ours pre-millenarian pietists seem to me the least fit to be commended as patterns of quiet waiting. They show a most unseemly haste to have the world's history closed and God's benign consummation brought in. It was so with some Christians in the days of the apostles, but it might have been ill for us if their impatient wills could have had sway. For many reasons it is good to wait. The Second Advent will exclude much that we now call faith, and the peculiar rewards attached to faith. The Son of Man comes to find faith, not to create it. If Christ's second coming were to take place at once, that solemn event might close the door on unborn souls of the future who may be great and holy beyond the range of our ideals. To-morrow will outshine to-day. Human history, thank God, is not finished yet. Its records would be an indelible aspersion on the Creator if He were to seal up its issues now; for hitherto evil seems to have outbalanced good. If the story of the nations were to end with the sunset we should think of it as the record of some dark, shameful day in our own past, the page of which we never wish to open again. A man would desire eternal forgetfulness in proportion to his virtue and unselfishness. We should always have an unworthy thought of God within us. It is better to wait, for in virtue, humanity, and high delight, the world's future will

eclipse its past. And if Christ's doctrine of community is true that "sower and reaper rejoice together," the longer the waiting the vaster the gladness and the more inconceivable in plenteousness the harvests in which we shall share. It is both nobler and more profitable to wait. Profounder gladness will come to us by this quiet waiting and hoping than by the swiftest accomplishment of our impatient day-dreams.

See to it that all your waiting is waiting for God, and not stolid living through the processes of the years only. There is not a little waiting in the world that does not associate itself in any degree with the upturning of the soul's expectation to God. Do not fill up the hours of your waiting with worldly intoxications that carry the soul away from what is Divine. I have seen men so carried away with the games of chance into which they had plunged on shipboard, that they quite forgot the goal for which the ship was shaping. They would scarcely lift the head a moment to look for land and port and home. Watch against all the mad excitements which would make you forgetful of the great ends of life and of the blessed goal to which every life should move. Never suffer yourself to be swept along the tide of the rushing years like the dumb creatures packed into cattle ships. Some men are hurried on to the goal without any thought or care for what is before them, and land under an anathema which can never be reversed.

"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Jesus Christ."

XIII.

THE TWO TRANSFIGURATIONS.

"We all beholding are changed into the same image."—2 Cor. iii. 18.

"When He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."—1 John iii. 2.

The transfiguration of Moses by his forty days' sojourn with God, and of Jesus Christ in one short watch of the night as He drew to His Father in prayer, were events that did more than accredit the Divine mission of these honoured messengers. The facts were typical, and suggestive of principles that were operating beyond the range of these special instances, and as such helped to colour the thought and speech and hope of the founders of the coming Church. Paul and John take hold of these inscrutable and stupendous transfiguration forces, and trace the effect of their working upon a man's moral life and character here, and upon his person and destiny hereafter. The Old Testament summons to this fixed and Godward look of the soul and salvation is made to begin with it. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved," is the Divine message by the prophet. And the maturer processes of salvation demand the same attitude of mind. "Beholding His glory," says the apostle, "we are changed." That is a moral trans-

figuration into the Christlike pattern which takes place here and now. "We shall be like Him," says the disciple, who had felt most effectually the power of His personal presence, "for we shall see Him as He is." That points to an organic change which will take place at the glorious and blessed coming. "Christ in you the hope of glory," is a memorable word that perhaps looks upon the moral transfiguration as the root and beginning of the organic, and so unites the two texts before us. Christ not only so acts upon us as to conform us to His holy and exalted pattern now; when He comes again it shall be to reflect His glory into the persons of His believing followers. The Church of the redeemed will mirror His surpassing loveliness and majesty. "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all that believe."

It may help the weak faith of some who stumble at the supernatural if we recognise that *assimilation forces are already at work* which change into finer quality, nobler form, more subtle function that which is gross, inert, unshaped. The earth in its noiseless flight gathers to itself cosmic dust, just as a miller in going to and fro amidst the revolving wheels of his mill draws to himself fine grains of flour, and the earth then conforms that dust to its own likeness. It puts its special stamp upon all that which it attracts by its superior mass, making it instinct with the same movement, splendid with the same colour, potent with the same properties and attributes. Perhaps it builds the molecules of this newly acquired matter into rose or vine, into bird or man. It pulls the pliant stuff into its own range, and then refines and exalts it into those living organisms that

are the glory of the earth. There is an attraction of assimilation which comes into play when the attraction of gravitation has done its part. The lower law hands over that which it accumulates to the higher.

It is by the law of assimilation that *men are bound together into homogeneous communities and nations.* The law sometimes works through motives of which we are more or less conscious, and sometimes by processes that for the present at least do not yield up their secret to our knowledge.

Transfigurations go on in the social realm that are *more or less consciously mimetic in their character.* It is because of this fact that the different parts of our common life at last match themselves into a congruous and harmonious whole. Many of the traits we bear are not innate, or due to the law of heredity. As our days run their course conspicuous modifications and adjustments go on. Dress men and women if you will in the most diverse costumes that can be devised. Let the world become for a space a masked ball, in which no dress shall be allowed that is a duplicate of another. In three months you will find the harlequin crowd dressing practically alike, probably following the fashion set by the handsomest or the most powerful member of the community. Eccentricity tends to efface itself, and human life works its way back to a common average. Bring together into the same camp or club or college men with the most pronounced angularities of speech, gait, manner, and unless they have reached the stage of life at which intellectual petrifaction begins, you will find within a twelvemonth most of their angularities will have disappeared. They will have caught accents, tricks of speech, airs

which stamp them at once as members of the same community. The man who goes to live in France or Italy catches the habit of the nationality and lifts his brows and speaks with a degree of histrionic gesticulation that tells its own tale. The man who crosses the Atlantic and settles in America becomes like an American. You think sometimes that his very features have lengthened. That is a physiological impossibility, but there has been a strange metamorphosis not explained by the mere use of the razor. He assumes facial expressions, acquires muscular habits, learns pantomimic attitudes that put him into a new category. His new surroundings have quite transformed him.

Great actors are said to infuse something of their power into the minor actors who are on the stage with them. Their far-ranging passions infect and possess their colleagues, and bring the tasks of the many into harmony with one imperial keynote. Without the annealing power of their speech, glance, carriage, masterful personality, the play drops into bits, and those who are taking part in it fall below the level of their *rôle*. Painters make their schools. They gather students and imitators, who become indoctrinated with their methods, and dropping early provincialisms, instinctively conform to a catholic ideal. It is impossible for men of such brilliant and distinctive styles as Carlyle, Macaulay, Ruskin, Tennyson to write without captivating shoals of minor writers who will carry the characteristic stamp they have received to the end of their days. Accomplished talkers like Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Samuel Johnson, excite corresponding fibres of genius in their companions and contemporaries.

The moulding forces of society tend to bring men into conformity with ruling types rather than to make them separatists.

And there is an assimilation to Christ's pattern that is more or less conscious, corresponding to these processes in the social realm around us. We yield ourselves up to the influence of good traditions. The transcendent beauty of Jesus Christ casts a spell over us, and we long to copy Him. And within certain limits we do find ourselves possessed of power through which we approximate, in external conduct at least, to His standard of truth and righteousness and compassion. The springs of Christ's spiritual personality can only transfuse themselves into us when we bathe in the tenderness that radiates from the Cross, and give ourselves up to that mystic ministry which comes down from heaven to honour the redeeming sacrifice, but voluntary and involuntary energies blend in effectuating this mighty change. There is something we can do, though we shall only realise this ideal by a transfiguration of nature as mysterious and supernatural as that through which Christ passed on the Holy Mount. We can "put on Christ," and take His word into our lips, and tread in His footsteps, and bring ourselves into some kind of outward conformity to His requirements.

And in ways unknown to us *these assimilative forces work deep down amidst the elemental mysteries of life.* Caterpillars when about to pass into the chrysalis stage seem to be photographically sensitive to the colour of their surroundings. A scientific observer put screens of white, black, and gold-coloured paper round the chrysalis of the small

tortoiseshell butterfly, and found that he could produce pupæ light, dark, or gold-spotted at will. The nervous system seems curiously responsive to the environment, and accommodates itself to the forms and hues that predominate in it. Every angler knows that the colour of the bottom of the stream will affect the shade of the trout. In a stream near Ivybridge, into which white clay was poured, the fish became perceptibly lighter in colour within a very short space of time. The inside of the tin in which the fisherman keeps the minnows with which he is going to bait is generally painted white, because the minnows grow lighter in tint through sensitiveness to the influence of the environment. A Syrian shepherd, by putting peeled rods of hazel before his flocks and herds in the breeding season, found that he could almost mark at will the skins and fleeces of the unborn young.

And the law holds in human life. The organisation passes through plastic stages of sensibility, in which it is peculiarly susceptible to the imprint of any new object that may be presented to it. The deep mental impressions of the mother often infix themselves legibly upon the young life she brings into the world. And even in adult stages sensitive and imaginative persons may be profoundly affected by a mere suggestion that is introduced into the mind. An experiment recently made in a Paris hospital proves that tumours may be produced by simple belief without any aggravating cause in the flesh itself. A bit of adhesive postage stamp, it is said, was put on the breast of a hospital nurse, and she was told it was a blister. The mere idea made the harmless bit of paper sting and produce an open sore. It seems

not unlikely that the Roman Catholic traditions of saints who had set themselves to meditate on the agonies of the pierced hands and feet, and at last received nail-marks in their own persons, are not simple myths, but have a basis of scientific fact.

And if there be a law of this sort it must surely run out into higher and more momentous forms. Shall God give to the frail, mute, unreasoning weaklings of the animal creation around us the power of assimilating themselves to the hues of their environment, so as the better to equip them for a life which is but a short spasm of sensations, and shall He deny the benefit of that catholic law to us who have come to the assembly and church of the firstborn, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, so that we may be transformed and fitted for the high distinction that is before us? Shall this mysterious law work through our fears and terrors and conform us to the disease of which we may think and work towards death, and shall it not also operate through hope and admiration and worship, and assimilate us to the ideal of health, and be fruitful for glory and honour and immortality? If we saturate ourselves in the influences of Christ's character, if we look at that perfect picture presented to us in the Word by the evangelists, if our view is ever turned towards the incomparable excellence of the Son of Man, we shall grow like Him in all that is highest and best, in virtue of transfiguration processes we cannot fathom. That is the truth taught by Paul. A moral assimilation will take place in us now if we look steadfastly at Christ.

And then when this world has sped, and we come at the end of the days to bathe our natures in the

vision of His peerless majesty and Divine enchantment, we shall be conformed in some degree to that which excites our profoundest worship, and grow like Him in what seems most distinctively His own as the glorified Son of the Father. That is the future transfiguration of which John speaks. John and Paul are dealing with the earlier and the later effect of the same essential law. The amazing changes of which the two apostles testify take place at different times and in different realms of life, but they are produced by one and the same active force or principle. Paul speaks of a moral change here, John of an organic change hereafter. We are even now in conditions in which we are being attracted more or less swiftly into the image of Christ's spiritual loveliness, but ere long we shall be attracted into conformity to the unknown splendour which invests the humanity enshrined and enthroned in the highest heaven. There is the same law for this and the coming life, the same formative processes at work in all worlds.

Do not allow yourself to think that when God declares He will make our destiny beyond the grave so great and resplendent that the humiliation and pitiful abasement of death shall be forgotten, that He is asking you to believe the incredible. Science preaches to us the continuity of law, and this change, which shall make us like unto Christ's glorious body, is but the perfect fruition of transformation processes that are brooding within us now. There is in all this a continuity of law which is in harmony with the latest genaralisations of science, and this makes the noble promise of the life to come reasonable, trustworthy, easy of belief. I am asked to believe no

more than when, seeing the sun change sap charged with the chemistries of the soil into leaf and blossom, I am told to believe that it will yet again change that into luscious, blushing fruit. I see the power at work upon my own character and upon the character of my fellow-believers, and I am only asked to trust that at some later stage it will work in richer and more varied form, and consummate every part of a man's being. No new force need be brought in to accomplish the promise of immortality presented in the gospel. The after transfiguration is but a projection of the process that begins here and now.

The chemical activity of a ray of light does not stop with its visibility. There is the same energy pulsating within the colour bands of the spectrum that address the eye, and also beyond them. In the processes of photography the chemical change is mainly due to that part of the ray of light which is outside the range of vision. And is it not thus with the forces of the spiritual universe? We see some little part of a transfiguration process that is at work in our own lives and in those of others. Whilst the gaze is fixed upon Christ's surpassing excellence and high spiritual perfection, craft and crookedness give place to candour and simplicity, worldly tastes and ambitions wither and the leanings of the life are spiritualised, pride bows its stiff neck, and humility appears in every look and motion, license is displaced by self-restraint, peevishness by long-suffering, captiousness by meek, brotherly forbearance. The bitter and vindictive man becomes sweet with genial and untiring forgiveness. The smile of Christ-like winsomeness and benignity chases the frown from the brow that was once lowering and Cain-like. That is

the part of the transfiguration change which lends itself to present observation. But the process continues itself beyond the range of the visible spectrum, and is at work in a sphere curtained off from us by impenetrable shadows. These assimilating processes here indicate the working of like processes in those who have passed from view. As they gaze upon Christ's person in that "building of God" to which they are received after leaving the body, His splendour becomes an enduring enshrinement in their beings. We are now changed into the image of the loving Son, the holy Worker, the sympathising Friend, the unmurmuring Sufferer. That part of the process which goes on where eye cannot see, nor ear hear, nor sense discern, changes into the image of the shining Victor, the crowned King, the Eternal Son glorified with the highest distinction the Father can put upon Him, and clothed with attributes that command the ecstatic homage of angels. "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me, that they may behold My glory." That prayer was dictated by no touch of human weakness or pride. He knew that seeing His glory they would catch its reflections, and come at last to share His high estate.

Do you long to know the secrets of the life to come? Is there a strong desire within you to reach a more definite conception of its destinies, and to search out the mysteries of those changes by which the vast consummation is reached? All well-based and intimate knowledge of such things must come from within. You know what conversion is. You looked and were saved, and ever since have felt yourself drawn towards what is Divine. Patiently strain-

ing your vision to the perfect pattern, you have become the conscious subject of an effectual transformation. You already bear a new image, and little by little the finer and more subtle qualities of that image are evolving themselves into view. The life to come is analogous to that. It is a beatific transition into a more majestic and resplendent image, sometimes preceded, like the renovation of the character into progressive ideals of perfection here, by cries and struggles and tears. Just as the astronomer measures the magnitude and distance of the stars by the little angle two rays of starlight form upon his theodolite, so by these transfiguration effects that come within the orbit of our vision here can we estimate in some degree the magnificent circles of ennoblement through which Christ's followers will pass when once received into His immediate presence.

This continuity of the law under which we are assimilated to Christ's pattern now seems to bring us into practical community with the life of the glorified on high. It is the selfsame power which operates upon my life of deepening obedience and spirituality here, and upon the natures of those who have attained the better part and are with Christ above. We are vessels in different stages of treatment. One roof is over us. The same changes fulfil themselves in us, and the same master-forces will touch us to our crowning completeness.

Both the earthly and the heavenly transfigurations rest upon *a common act of contemplation.* It is said that the monks of Mount Athos are accustomed to hypnotise themselves into trance conditions by gazing at their own bodies—no very ennobling objective if

true. In some of the Buddhist monasteries of Eastern Asia devotees are pointed out who have sat facing blank walls for twenty or thirty years, and have gazed themselves into mysterious ecstasies. In the modernised Buddhism of London and New York theosophy the same virtue is ascribed to intense and sustained contemplation, and in all these things there may be occult forces at work of which we know but little. We find as a matter of experience that we can absorb and assimilate that on which we succeed in detaining the attention of our concentrated powers. To detach the thought from the universe of matter and occupy and possess it with super-senuous contemplations may originate lofty moods of soul, even where there is no living object of fellowship. Now the question arises, if men by projecting themselves into moods of abstraction discover new powers of mind, find unknown fires begin to burn within them, and rise into worlds of spiritual ecstasy, what change, think you, ought to effect itself within us if with the same steadfastness we contemplate the personality of Him who is the leader and consummator of our faith? Into what exaltations may not we pass when we surrender ourselves to the allurements of His spiritual personality, and pass our days in intimate contact with His ever-present life? The vista opened up for us by the rending of the veil of Christ's flesh is filled with high spiritual beauty and enchantment. As we gaze we absorb and assimilate and are changed into the same image. And when the veil of our own flesh is rent, and the supreme vision of the Lamb upon the throne bursts upon us, will not that conform our plastic and new-created bodies to the likeness of

His triumphant personality? "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Both here and hereafter the act of contemplation which takes us out of ourselves and into Christ puts a new stamp upon us. We cannot look with sympathy upon His moral loveliness here, or with worship upon His glorious majesty hereafter, without realising some amazing approximation to His likeness.

Another analogy worthy of our notice is that these transfiguration processes *effect themselves upon a new and impressionable life.* Both the individual and the race of which he is a part pass through plastic stages, in which it is comparatively easy to receive the imprint of a new characteristic. Impressions, however forcible, made upon the imagination and sensibilities leave no mark on crystallised natures. It is the unborn babe which is responsive to the image presented to the brain of the mother, rather than the mother herself. Races tend to become stereotyped after reaching specific crises of civilisation, and acquire new habits and instincts and aptitudes with difficulty. The chrysalis is no longer affected by the colour of its surroundings when it reaches the last stages of its development.

And in the realm of spiritual life and movement this fact has its counterpart. The transcendent beauty of Christ imprints itself only in natures made tender by the Spirit. Till the Holy Ghost comes to brood within us, the material of which we consist does not lend itself to these high spiritual transformations. A man may try and look at Christ for a lifetime. He may have an adequate intellectual conception of this ideal character. Every grace may be discriminated and command its due meed of

homage, but all in vain unless there be a new and tender life to receive the imprint of the perfect personality thus presented to the thought and emotion. This process is not human and ethical only. The life dawning in that birth mediated through the Spirit is alone susceptible of these sublime modifications and perfectings.

And in the heavenly transfiguration there is the same parallel or analogy. The impress of the beatific vision stamps itself upon the new life that has just issued from the grave. All sin is effaceable here, but some of its uncomely effects are not entirely so. The lines have been too deeply furrowed to be wiped out by anything short of a new birth from the dust. Intense contemplation, rapt vision, close and holy converse with the Divine, will not always obliterate the brands and scars left in the organic life. If man's nature is to be photographically sensitive to the celestial splendour of the Son of Man in His last glorious manifestation, the quickening from the death of sin to the life of righteousness must be followed by a new birth of man's sentient life from the dust of death.

But in these transfigurations there are *contrasts* that call for notice as well as analogies. These contrasts arise, however, not from the fact that different forces are brought into use to effect these changes, but from the different degrees of aptitude which appear in the early and late stages of the religious history of the soul.

The first transformation is brought to pass by contemplating the *reflected image* of Christ; the second, by contemplating *the direct glory of His essential nature*. "Beholding as in a glass." Re-

vised Version, "Reflecting as in a mirror." Perhaps we get the best sense by combining the two renderings. Others reflect the image of Christ for us, as we must come in due time to reflect that image for the help and perfecting of those who look to us for their knowledge of Christ. The picture conveyed by the mirror is as genuine as the original object itself. The records of the evangelists and the testimonies of those who come after them are not tissues of myths and fantasies and imaginations. It is a perfectly valid and trustworthy setting forth of the personality of Jesus Christ we receive, and the Spirit accredits it by using this earthly copy in His own reproduction of Christ in the believer. But in a reflection something is always lost. Colours, it may be, are absorbed and not given out again. And yet the picture is both true and influential, for under its spell we find ourselves passing into a nobler and a more perfect type.

But Christ at His coming will be directly presented to us, and that is the secret in part of the yet more marvellous transition we shall undergo as we stand before Him. A deeper and more moving insight will be reached than was possible even to the most spiritual natures, when some of the materials for the conception of Christ were second-hand. Perhaps the more perfect transfiguration is to be explained in part by the more wonderful subject-matter presented to the consciousness. Is there not here an argument from the less to the greater? If the broken gleams of Christ's life, the fragments of His tradition, the piecemeal presentation of His character and personality to the world by His followers, can effect these sublime changes amongst men, how

much richer will be the transfigurations effected by His direct personal manifestation at His second coming, "without spot unto salvation"? If the mere shadow of Jesus, the reflection projected by His Word and works, the dream-like light and tenderness coming to us from across the centuries, can effect such wonders, what surpassing miracle will be wrought by the manifestation of His absolute and essential life to His triumphant followers?

In the first transfiguration *the Spirit is the agent of the change;* in the second and final transfiguration *the ministry of the Spirit is superseded*, or at least falls into the background. The later change is achieved by the direct power of the Son Himself, who no longer needs to be glorified by a secret witness in the hearts of His disciples, for He is manifested in glory. It was by the power of the Holy Ghost that the disciples were first sanctified and brought to bear the traits and share the life of their King. Christ was formed within them through the life ministered by Him who came to take the departed Master's place. But in the fulness of the regeneration the saints who stand before Christ at His appearing receive at once through their glorified senses the transforming splendour which radiates from His person. The Spirit has given up His mediating ministry between Jesus and the world, as Jesus Himself will soon give up His mediating ministry to the Father. And now at length direct vision is possible without the Spirit interposed between Christ and these dim, infirm, half-blinded natures of ours. There are no longer intractable wills to be dealt with in this second transfiguration. The righteous burst forth at one into the zenith of

their destinies like stars into the swift-kindling splendour of the firmament. The Son creates them at once to new majesty as He once created worlds, for His power is dealing with an entirely obedient material, a material ruled by regenerated wills promptly and absolutely responsive to His sovereignty.

The present transfiguration is gradual and progressive, whilst the future is instantaneous. In drawing this comparison there is no need to underestimate either the magnitude or the swiftness of the changes possible in this elementary stage. There is already a day-dawn of spiritual glory, but that day-dawn can only be expanded to its full brightness and splendour with the successive stages of the flowing life. Whilst the change effected at Christ's second coming is like the sudden lighting up of a sun, that effected now is like the slow process of attrition which little by little evolves the brilliance of the precious stone. The stone does not flash rainbows the moment it touches the lapidary's wheel. By a tedious treatment it is polished till it looks at last as though it belonged to heaven rather than to this dull, ashen earth. Salvation from sin, from all that weakens or dishonours or discredits, from whatever calls down the Divine condemnation, is swift, or may be so; but the process of bringing out the high spiritual lustres that are hidden in human character, of training men to the uttermost perfection of which they are capable, of putting upon Christ's disciples a stamp which shall single them out as His companions and body-guard, may sometimes occupy many years. "From glory to glory." The change at Christ's last coming will be immediate. "We shall see Him as He is," and pass at once into the distinctions of His

sovereignty. Quick as the kindling of light His exalted humanity will implant itself in us. In that life of unknown blessedness there will be scope for ever-enlarging knowledge, strength, dignity of nature, but men will rise at once into participation with the privileges of Christ's enthronement and conformity to His Divine kingliness. "When He shall appear we shall be like Him." The trumpet note which calls us from the dead does not give us our last distinction, or put upon our deathless bodies the supreme stamp of majesty. That is reserved for the vision of the glorified King, and consummates all the wonderful works of the past.

The earthly transfiguration we may think of as represented by the slow change that passed over Moses on the Mount, refining, exalting, and irradiating his form. He was with God forty days and nights, and the glory slowly permeated his life and gave him the unmistakable distinction pertaining to a friend and messenger of the Most High. Each day of his sojourn he grew in majesty and spiritual ennoblement. The second transfiguration finds its type in the change that passed over Jesus as the cloud encircled Him, and the voice testified of His matchless kinship and affinity with the Father. As the Son touched the presence of the Father in prayer, the hidden Divinity within Him leaped forth to greet its Fellow. The nearer touch of heaven instantaneously changed Him, as the swift, uprushing tropical sunlight brings the gleam upon the hills. It was not from step to step of splendour as with us, not ennoblement by a long series of gradations, but a leap, a flash, an outburst. And thus will it be at Christ's second coming. The change into the similitude of Christ's

glorious humanity at His appearing will be swift as the trumpet note which calls men from their graves. Eternal progress will characterise the life that then dawns, but it will receive as its immediate birthright the honour and glory that came to the Son in the Holy Mount. It will attain its distinctive character at the starting-point. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him."

The thought that stands out above all the others in these comparisons and contrasts is, that these two blessed changes are *so vitally related to each other that one is a pledge and a forecast of the other.* In the cases of both Moses and Jesus Christ it is obvious that the inspired writers intend us to recognise that these organic transfigurations arose out of spiritual conditions and experiences. It was when Moses mused and wondered and worshipped face to face with the Divine sanctity, and the holiness of God's law began to pour itself into all the channels of his personality, that he became changed in visage, and his obscured dignity as a son of God gleamed forth. And it was as Christ held communion with His Father that the hidden spring of beauty in His being was touched, and streamed forth upon the wondering disciples. The moral was the basis and indeed the germ of the organic transfiguration. The first was the seed of the second mighty change. Princely beauty hides itself away in the sons of God everywhere, and if we only suffer the Spirit of God to come to us and assimilate our characters to the Christ-like ideal, that beauty will adorn even the bodies of our humiliation, and will at last clothe our quickened and recreated flesh for ever. Guard unhurt the germ. See that the law of approximation to Christ is at work in all the occasions of

common life. That will guarantee the rest. The man who is daily renewed into Christ's similitude by the Spirit may dismiss all the baffling problems of the future. They are of purely speculative interest. The first transfiguration is one of conditional morals; the second that of unconditional power, and wherever the first takes place the second is irrevocably destined to come. If we are absorbed into Christ, and Christ into us, when He is manifested we also shall be manifested with Him in glory. He is in us the hope of glory, and such a hope maketh not ashamed.

Let us look upon every step in the perfecting of character as an additional security for the glorious change that is set before us. If Nature were a sentient whole, as is sometimes assumed, I could imagine the opening buds of the North feeling some sympathetic thrill that has travelled from the life of the South, and saying amongst themselves, "These processes that are mere scales and knobs and swellings with us are already flowers on the warm shores of the Mediterranean." Do the orchards ever whisper to each other, "These blossoms that hide pulp, acidity, uncertain chances, are already golden fruit in the lands of Sicily and Spain? The sense of warmth is in the air, and the piled-up fruits of the South are already sent to bear witness of what the warmth will achieve in us." The crops about the lochs of the Scottish Highlands are green whilst the reapers sing in the yellow, swaying fields of Cornwall and Devon. Do those Northern crops ever whisper to each other across the straths, "The warm sheets of sunshine that have bronzed the Southern crops are creeping on to immerse us in their genial tides, and we shall not be left in barrenness? Nature is impartial in her ministries, and

what is consummated there will be completed here, for there are no geographical landmarks to arrest the throb of summer life, and the life that has reached its meridian there already pulsates within us."

And is it not thus with Christ's followers? The light which has glorified Enoch and Moses and Elias, and the only-begotten Son, is touching us. Not only do we see the firstfruits in these elect natures, but we ourselves have entered into the earlier gradations of change. We feel some faint thrill of the transfiguration processes that take place in the realm God illustrates with His beatific presence. The moral change of which Paul speaks is the pledge of that of which John speaks with rapturous hope, its preparation and groundwork, the very threshold across which the children of light pass into their dazzling destinies; and on that threshold we stand who are now "looking unto Jesus."

XIV.

MAN AND HIS DIVINE PROTOTYPE.

"So God created man in His own image."—GEN. i. 27.

MANY passages in the early chapters of the Book of Genesis are characterised by a depth, a dignity, a far-seeing wisdom, which ought to prevent any fair-minded man from condemning them as foolish and legendary. It is true these narratives and allegories are couched in baby-speech, but when we consider the rude conditions of the races to which they were first addressed, and remember that human language was a slow evolution, we shall not regard that as any drawback to their wonderful insight and inspiration. The lesson addressed to a child may be unscientific in its language, and yet fraught at the same time with the most delicate wisdom and unerring insight. I should call the man unscientific in the last degree who tried to teach children in terms of strict scientific accuracy. Hans Andersen could not tell his charming children's stories in the language of Emanuel Kant, Auguste Comte, or Herbert Spencer. It was impossible to put exact science into the baby-speech of the epoch when these early chapters took shape without frustrating the first motive of their composition. For a rightly-constituted mind childlike sim-

plicity of speech will not hide the deep and far-reaching ideas that may lie beneath it. In the whole range of ancient religious literature I know of no passage that for suggestive, many-sided, far-reaching wisdom, can compare with that before us. In all probability it is older than Moses, for Moses only edits and authenticates these earlier narratives and allegories. It is older than all existing religions, and yet it anticipates the ruling errors of these great systems of perverted faith, and establishes a test which condemns them by implication. It lays the foundation for the rational statement of a crowning Christian mystery, and is the very fibre of the philosophy that must sustain every humane code of law, and justify every practical philanthropy.

Does it not supply an adequate safeguard against every great error or corruption that has brought its ferment into the religious history of mankind? All forms of Oriental faith are *Pantheistic* in their basis. To a mind of philosophic bent idolatry is defensible only where there is a groundwork of dogmatic Pantheism. That creed identifies God with nature and with every part of nature alike. It assumes that God can be just as adequately revealed through a tree, a river, a stone, as through a prophet, a martyr, or a saint. The Mosaic teaching which asserts that God made man in His own image brings God into a peculiar and specific relation of affinity with the race, and implies it is only through perfected human nature that God can be adequately unveiled and apprehended. There is no great and suggestive community of life between God and the inferior creation that lies at man's feet, no bond of possible classification for the two. God is so far from being promiscuously

one with His creation at large, that the only true meeting-point between His being and the creation which rose from His hand is in man.

Pantheism is *fatalistic* by the force and logic of its own peculiar genius. Other religions besides those which are commonly grouped as Pantheistic are fatalistic also, but by accident rather than by logical sequence. From the dawn of history the thought of the vast populations of Asia has been all but unanimously necessarian. This suggestive utterance of the religious day-dawn carries with it a significant condemnation of those coming forms of error which should teach that a man's conduct is determined for him, and he does not determine it himself. If man be made in the image of God he cannot be the slave of an irresistible necessity. He is higher than the blind forces of nature. In this first chapter of Genesis God is presented to us in successive cycles of moral action. He is described as creating matter and light and life of all types, and man, because He *willed* to create such things. His activity was the outcome of His own choice and counsel. And it was in the specific image of this great Being, whose acts were morally free, that man was made. The will of man can evolve and create in the realm of motive just as truly as God in the realm of matter. To affirm that man belongs, in some degree, to the same normal type as God is to assert that he is not the slave of necessity, and to condemn by anticipation all fatalistic religions and philosophies.

Look for a moment at the bearing of this declaration upon a grotesque and demoralising doctrine that has prevailed from Egypt to Japan, and from Tartary to Polynesia, *the doctrine that the soul is not*

unchangeably human, but that it may pass into reptile, insect, or quadruped. Moses must have been familiar with the doctrine of the transmigration of souls in Egypt, and possibly saw how this marvellous bit of inspired tradition would counteract it. If man alone was made in the image of God, he was put by that very fact into a distinct and separate category. No exchange of soul between those in this elect category and the brute creatures outside it could ever become possible. Man bears in his immaterial life the impress of one between whose nature and that of the brute there can be no free community of life and consciousness. If we listen to the story of man's creation we shall never fall into the error of investing animal life with the sacredness that belongs to one who is little lower than the angels, and may one day transcend them. It will keep us from obliterating after the fashion of Oriental religions the distinctions that separate man from the brute. And the error is not so remote or hypothetical as some may think.

And then notice how this assertion lays the foundation for *a rational doctrine of the Incarnation.* There is no such opposition between the human and the Divine natures as we sometimes imagine. The difference is one of degree rather than of inmost essence. They are not antithetic as light and darkness, but as starlight and universal sunshine. God can become man, because man was originally made in His image and likeness. No such promiscuous incarnations are possible as the Eastern imagination has devised. An incarnation is possible within these rigid limits only because God made man in His own image.

Think of the bearing of this utterance upon the

laws and civilisations of the future. The assertion condemns caste of every degree, slavery, industrial oppression, the degradation of woman. It brands by anticipation every government under which man is abased. Is it not a wonderful utterance for the age from which it comes?

I. *These words bespeak our reverence for universal man as man.* You will remember how they are made the basis for teaching the sacredness of human life in connection with the law given to Noah. To destroy human was something very different from taking animal life, and the offence must be visited with death. Man is made in the image of God. That is the foundation of all law. And then you will remember how James in the New Testament hints the essential wickedness that inheres in words of cursing because man was made in the image of God.

Some modern thinkers and moralists assert that Christianity has failed to extend adequate reverence and honour to man. Its adherents have been so busy in paying the homage owing to God, that they have forgotten to give the meed of honour due to each other. Too little has been made of the intrinsic nobility of human nature.

Well, if the complaint is just, the error has not been that of the first teachers of the Christian faith so much as of their after disciples. We need no new religion to teach us the sacred qualities at the root of all human souls. Man's dignity rests upon a very much higher foundation than any puddled and muddled quagmire of sanctions which Positivism can construct for us. Man is made in God's image, and if that be so we sin against the Divine Archetype in treating Him with neglect,

derision, contempt. All right law must be built upon the recognition of His manifold claim—man's claim to life and to all that is essential to the majesty of life. The legislation that recognises this truth will never go far astray. A belief in Moses will rule out all inequalities in the application of law. Wealth, and the influence wealth brings to bear, must count for the dust of the balance in comparison with the sacredness of human life. If, by refusing legislation necessary for the protection of the weak and the defenceless, we give the unscrupulous capitalist a free hand to imperil or shorten the term of human life, we are guilty of treason against the throne of Him in whose image man was made. We sin against God when we assume any economic law is so sacred that its operation must be suffered to strip and crush and annihilate man at will.

Every man we touch to-day has more than princely blood in his veins. In his soul there is some faint survival of God's high image. It is this which clothes his right with such solemnity and undeniable impressiveness. No claim or privilege of a favoured class can compare with the claim common to the lowliest member of the race made in the image of God.

Do we always think of our neighbours in the light of this bit of inspired and immortal tradition? Our scorn perhaps shows itself in practical ways. We look upon those around us as machines for making so many revolutions in the day, running up so many steps, carrying so many pounds' weight, yielding up so much work in the course of twelve or fourteen hours, and it would be quite a new standpoint for us if we were to reflect that upon every man there is

stamped some hidden line of likeness to the great God in heaven.

We are told that in some cases contempt and cursing are the only motive forces that will make the human machine spin at its proper rate of speed. I have met with shipmasters—happily the specimen is fast dying out—who have seriously affirmed that a ship can no more be navigated without a given quantity of cursing at the seamen than she could be run two hundred miles a day without either canvas or coal. Some military officers will tell you that a regiment can no more be drilled without showers of oaths and imprecations than it can be marched without a commissariat. Servants must be snapped at, once a week at the very least, if they are to be kept trim and brisk and mindful of their duties, and if rooms are to be well dusted and dinners cooked to a turn. Certain races of men, it is said, must be told what they have to do rather than reasoned with. Even the preacher must not assume that all his hearers are made in the rational and moral image of God. Congregations must be shouted at as if they were all ear-drum and had no brain behind it. The tricks of the stage must be tried, the startling attitude, the cheap sentiment of the story-teller. It is a mistake to address the reason, or the conscience, or the moral faculties. The preacher must not take for granted anything so flattering as the Bible statement that his hearers are made in the Divine image.

Perhaps some of you would like to be addressed as babes, to be diverted by noise, tickled by buffoonery, or harrowed by sensation. God forbid that I should forget in Whose image you are made. The contempt for the high dignity of human nature shown by some

clap-trap men who acquire reputation is veiled blasphemy. Remember the perfect reverence of Jesus Christ for man as man, His exquisite courtesy, His care and patience in reasoning with men. Think of the grace and gentleness of His address to Simon the Pharisee, who had offered Him a slight little short of insult. Call to mind His condemnation of the man who would call his brother "fool" or "Raca." The man is hopelessly losing all trace of God's image in himself who forgets that image in his brother, and is in peril of hell-fire.

Guard against cynical views of human nature. Man is made in the image of God. If so, we sin against God when we make man the subject of acrimonious and unpitying analysis and the butt of irreverent satire. I do not underestimate the good that may be accomplished by wise and well-regulated satire. Jesus Christ Himself used it. If the caustic is applied by a skilled and kindly hand, it may remove many an excrescence from the character and life. But we too often use it after the Parisian fashion of vitriol-throwing. Anybody who may seem open to criticism and caricature, we seek to cover from head to foot with red-hot, unmitigated scorn. There are writers of reckless, vitriolic vindictiveness. There are weekly publications that hold up every type of human nature to sheer, unqualified contempt. Some of you may possibly batten upon the precious fragments of these weeklies. The scavenger school of criticism may be necessary, but beware of feeding on the miserable carrion with which the railway bookstalls and cheap news-shops are baited. Do not bring yourself to believe, what will be the necessary induction from this style of reading, that integrity

truth, unselfishness, sincerity have no existence in the present-day world. Do not assume you are becoming wise because you are so cynical.

Jesus Christ saw much further into human hearts and lives than any of us, and never became a cynic. The spirit of reverence for man as man He maintained to the trying end. His heart of forgiving love kept Him from revenging Himself upon the evil He discerned, by a temper of misanthropy and disdain. You never become cynical to your children. Love keeps you from that. It gives you a coign of vantage from which you can sweep coming horizons and see hidden promise. Christ saw the good as well as the evil in man, as may every one who looks deep down into the souls around him. The contempt for human nature into which you are falling implies that you are not gracious and forgiving like Christ Himself, and you see a very little way into the labyrinth of human character and life. If your glance were not so superficial, you would be able to find some lingering trace of God's image, some after-glow of the transcendent illumination with which God enriched the human soul at the beginning. So little impressed are some of us by the Bible description of what man is, that we hear scandal without protest or shame and pain. Contempt for man is the first step to atheism. When you have well learned the lesson of cynical distrust of man, you will soon come to learn the lesson of entire disbelief in man's great, pure, perfect Prototype, God Himself.

You reverence fallen greatness. For an emperor who has lost his sceptre, for a millionaire whose wealth has ebbed away, for the man in a premature dotage who once bade fair to be the most command-

ing thinker of his day, you feel some sort of pathetic respect. In the basest conditions into which man sinks you have residuary touches of nobility and greatness. The disparity between the princeliest intellect and the man whose incapacity seems to stamp him as a fated outcast, is indefinitely less than that between the hindmost man in the scale of human society and the best-bred, best-trained, and most sagacious type of animal.

Away in the desert lies a buried metropolis of art. The Arab as he prances by sees nothing but sand-dunes spiked with thorns or matted over with sprawling weeds. But beneath thorn and poison-weed and sand-drift lie wonderful groups of marble and porphyry, and many a chamber filled with unfaded fresco and glittering mosaic. One day a great explorer will come with firman and scaffolding and labourers, and find as much wealth there as in the richest square mile of the richest capital in Europe.

You laugh at the optimistic anthropology of Moses, and tell of Darwin's Patagonian Indians, or Swan and Murray River Australians who have a one-handed arithmetic only, or of Stanley's impish dwarfs hurling their poisoned darts from behind the trees of the forest, or of the savage of the city slum, who is perhaps as dark and brutal and hopeless as any specimen described by traveller. He is all weed and poison and cruelty. Tread reverently where the weed is rankest and the desert desolation most appalling, for in every man there is buried magnificence, much to command reverence and awe, if you will only look long and far enough. By and by there will come missionary, slum evangelist, ragged school teacher, who yet has faith in the Fatherhood of God and the

brotherhood of man, and he will find some capacity in the nature you have helped to trample under foot, and lift it to light and honour for your shame and reproach.

II. This subject seems to suggest to us that if the Divine and human natures belong to the same great class or category, *we shall attain the highest knowledge of God possible to us by taking man as our starting-point,* and rising step by step through the analogies of human consciousness, faculty, affection.

The late Matthew Arnold said some little time ago that the average British conception of God was that of an indefinitely "magnified Lord Shaftesbury." The supercilious sneer of the critic need not terrify us. If the magnifying process is sufficiently vast, and the elimination of human narrowness and imperfection from the idea sufficiently thorough, I do not know that we need dread a conception of God reached through the analogy of a contemporary philanthropist. We may learn something of God by beginning even with the study of personalities drawn upon a very much meaner scale than that of the titled philanthropist named in Matthew Arnold's irreverent sneer.

Some men seek to know God by starting from inanimate nature, although it is a much higher compliment to begin with Lord Shaftesbury. They think that He is more intimately identified and more adequately unveiled to us through the laws of gravitation, molecular attraction, the secret force that works through a long vista of evolutions, the mysterious, deathless, untiring movement that is underneath all life, than through the analogies of a man's personal consciousness. They speak of a God who is "supra-personal." No wonder that when this is the

method of inquiry so many minds around us are unable to arise to the conception of a personal and self-conscious God.

They are like some English botanist who has just heard of the discovery of a rare tropical flower. The traveller who has found it has written and sent home an account of its characteristic features, and traced out all its affinities. It has a congener or near relative in some bloom to be found in our British woods. But the botanist, instead of studying this rare flower through the kindred flower at his feet, turns to a handbook of chemistry, so that he may learn something about the dyes of its petals, or goes to a school of mineralogy, so that he may know something of the soil in which it grows. You would say at once the man is in the wrong groove of work. The group or kingdom to which it belongs is represented within sight of his own door, and he must study it through its nearest type. So with us in our search after God. We must rise to some conception of what He is through the analogies of human consciousness.

If a man wishes to study Sanscrit, and is without teacher or dictionary, it will do him no good to learn the Kaffir click. He must feel his way into it through the nearest cognate language. And so in our study of God we must start from underlying elements common to the human and Divine natures. There can be no personal life or consciousness in man without intelligence, will, memory, affection. These things are the essential attributes of the personal mind. They are the very groundwork of human nature. If man's nature is the transcript of God's, these qualities must exist in an infinitely extended form within the Divine nature itself. However far

the moral attributes of man's nature may have been effaced, these natural attributes that must guide us to our fundamental conception of man's great Archetype are undestroyed. Man may be a blurred and broken miniature of God, but in all the foundation elements of his being he represents Him still. If you are making some biographical study, and have a defaced and dismembered miniature of the man who is the subject of it, you will know more about him by that than if you get a ton of stone from the quarry of which he was the proprietor, or buy all his cabinets of geological specimens. If you start your study of God from inanimate nature, or indeed from any type of life lower than your own, it will be no wonder should you land yourself in modified materialism, or something not very much better. God laid a foundation for all true knowledge of Himself when He made man in His own image.

But I may be told, "This argument addresses itself to one who already accepts the principle of the Mosaic story. How can it be binding upon an inquirer who is unfortunate enough to repudiate the authority of the Bible? The process is quite easy if the first premise is accepted, that man is made in the image of God."

I reply, Self-consciousness is the germ of all knowledge, and there is no reason why we should discard its truths when we come to the study of God. It is through himself man comes to know physical nature. At the outset the world is a great looking-glass, in which the ungrown man sees himself more or less modified. Child and savage alike conceive of natural objects under the analogies of the personal life. Trees, rocks, rivers are living things of like passions

with themselves, and they are made to speak the same words. Of course there are many errors in the process which must be corrected by subsequent observation, but science itself would be impossible apart from that crude starting-point. In building up our ideas of God, why should we depart from this method? We must accept the analogies of human life and consciousness till we find in what points they need correction and enlargement. There will be less to correct here than in the ideas we have formed of common objects. The miniature of God, as well as of Nature, is within us. More still, in seeking to learn the wonderful cause of all things, we must start with that which is most wonderful.

The modern botanist classifies plants by flower and fruit and seed vessels. They were once classified by the shape of their leaves. A Chinese herbal classifies them according to their uses—textile, dietetic, medicinal. That is unscientific. If we accept the doctrine of evolution, we must recognise that man is the culminating product of all past processes. How must we judge of the far-off hidden seed from which all life came? By studying its loftiest fruition to-day. The philosophy which makes molecular force the starting-point for its study of God, rather than consciousness, will, intelligence, affection, will one day rank with the unscientific systems which classified trees according to their uses or the shape of their leaves. If you want to climb the mountain-peak that enters the clouds, do not descend into the deepest cavern of earth for your starting-point. Begin at the loftiest habitation of man, and where the last highway stops.

May we carry our principle into the sphere of character, and argue from what man is to what God is

likewise? We argue from our personal consciousness, will, intelligence, affection, to the personal consciousness, will, intelligence, affection of God, the great Prototype, in whose image we are made. We can no more degenerate from the type to which we belong in this respect than man can degenerate from the physiological type to which he belongs into a bat, a centipede, an octopus. But shall we be on equally safe ground in arguing from the moral attributes and character of man to those of God? In a word, is human nature the final test of Divine truth? Some people assume it is. They say, "I cannot believe God would do this or that or the other because I would not. I cannot believe He cherishes a severe or wrathful disposition because I do not cherish it."

It may be allowed that, under very strict conditions, human nature does carry within itself a true impress of God. In some degree man's moral life still faintly reflects God's. God's righteousness is the same in kind, although wiser in application and immeasurably vaster in degree than human righteousness. Human love, in its purest and most exquisite forms and manifestations, presents us with some dim hint of His surpassing love. This is the one quality of the similitude that has been least faded by time and transgression. And yet the image has been more or less changed. Just as the image imprinted upon the human face may be so distorted by disease that scarcely any resemblance to father or mother or brother or sister is left, so with the influence of evil passion and habit upon God's image in the soul. Its marks seem to have all but passed away. God recognises in His apostrophe to the wicked man in the Psalms this partial effacement: "Thou thoughtest

that I was altogether such an one as thyself." The Divine Speaker does not disclaim the old likeness without qualification, but we must beware of fashioning God in the image of our frailties.

But the perfect image of God reappears in Jesus Christ just as a likeness that may have been obscured by disease reappears with the returning health of after-generations. "He is the express image of God's person." And in Him the image was never blotted out or impaired. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." His incarnation brings back the lost image, and recovers it for the race of which He is "the firstborn."

Our renewal implants Christ within us, and puts back within our reach the power of knowing God through ourselves. St. Paul speaks of being renewed in "knowledge" after the image of Him that created us. The complete renewal always brings back the power of knowing God to the human heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart," said Jesus Christ, "for they shall see God"—see Him reflected by inward spiritual processes, as the league-long landscape is mirrored in the eye.

The teaching of the Bible centres the ultimate knowledge of God, not in a Book, however sacred the source of its inspiration; not in a Church, however apostolic its dogma and however sober its claim to authority, but in the nature of the perfectly sanctified man. Renewal in the lost image comprehends renewal in knowledge as well as in righteousness and true holiness.

In excavating the houses at Pompeii that were choked with dust and ash and lava streams two thousand years ago, the pick of the workman some-

times finds its way through the fused and solidified volcanic mass into a hollow space. He announces the fact to the director of the works, who then prepares plaster of Paris, and pours it into the mysterious void. After the plaster has set, the ash is broken away, and an image or perfect cast is found of some Roman man or woman who perished there twenty centuries ago. Every trace of the body has gone, clothes, flesh, bone are all destroyed, but the lava hardening round the place where the figure once lay has shaped itself into a faultless mould.

And in God's economy do we not know of processes very much like that? The first life has perished. There is little or nothing left of man's original righteousness. The nature is a scene of black spiritual desolation. Its noble spaces are choked with the very vomit of hell, its avenues clogged with the refuse and rubbish and sweepings of bygone passions, its capacities hidden away under heaps of ruin. But at the core of all this desolation there are mysterious voids, significant solicitations, deep and clearly-defined wants. The conscious privations of man's nature have a specific character that preserve the subtle lines and lineaments of his original creation. Let the Spirit of God diffuse life, love, sanctity, into these buried capabilities which wait to be filled, these abysmal wants which wait to be satisfied, and the picture of all that was Divine in unfallen man comes back again. "Filled with all the fulness of God," the lost symmetries of five or ten thousand years ago are revived for the wonder of the world and the glory of God's power. "The new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

III. *These words seem to designate man in the most*

impressive terms for his high fellowship with God. The community of two conscious and intelligent beings in thought, sensibility, pursuit, is possible only in the proportion in which they possess fundamental elements of likeness to each other. No intercommunication of idea is possible, or is possible in a very elementary degree only, between creatures that belong to entirely different genera or species. A man may have dominion over the world of animal life, but he cannot bring the most sagacious representatives of the animal kingdom into touch with a hundredth-part of his ideas and sensibilities. No interchange of subtle and complex ideas is possible without language. Max Müller says that we cannot think without language. In that case the effort to bridge the chasm between human and animal life is hopeless. You may make a dog or a horse understand a few elementary wishes, but it is a very crude and inferior side of your life into which he can enter. Naturalists have made ingenious and patient studies of animal intelligence, but they have not got very far into the subject. Habits are watched, but habits do not always give the key to exact processes of thought. The tiniest ant, the most stupid bee, the dullest worm knows more about the thoughts of its mate than Sir John Lubbock with his years of study and experiment. A single whisk of its antennæ will bring information the naturalist would be glad to gather in a lifetime. But insect and animal show little interest in the life that lies outside its own groove, unless perhaps as a possible prey to be captured. And the animal knows nothing of our more complex thought and movement. All sections of the human race find it possible to communicate with each other. Language has had some queer

developments, but I know of no race speaking a language that could not be learned by some other race. However degraded man may be, he can communicate with his fellows upon a much wider range of interests than are common to man and the brute. The gulf between man and man can always be crossed.

So with God and the human race. They belong to one category. Man is after the Divine model. The attributes and qualities of God are infinite in degree, but they have points of contact with all the high and original attributes and qualities of man. Because we are made in the same image, the most degraded amongst us can be brought to know God. The spirit was organised after God's Spirit for that very end.

It is always possible to quicken and develop a lost quality. It is not possible to graft into a species a faculty not possessed in some degree by an ancestor of the species. By the gospel God quickens and evolves the germ of an aborted capacity within us, the capacity of knowing Him and living in constant touch with His mind and will. Made in His image, a member of the family of which He is the great mysterious Prototype, our cry has a significance attaching to no other cry that rises up to His ear. He feeds the ravens. He gives meat to the young lions when they roar and seek their meat from God. But no strain comes with such tremulous appeal to His heart as the plaint of those who belong to the same type with Himself.

In one of his books of travel, Du Chaillu speaks of the horror that seized upon him when he shot his first gorilla. The cry of the poor creature was so human, its attitudes and expressions of pain so like those of

a suffering man, that he imagined he had perpetrated something not far short of murder. He could scarcely acquit himself of blood-guiltiness. The tie that binds us to God is inexpressibly higher and more sacred than the tie which binds the most human-like brute to man. No cry, however plaintive and piteous, that has ever risen from the world of animal life to a kindly human heart can compare in its melting persuasiveness and its poignant appeal to my prayer, as it wings itself to the attending ear of the Eternal. I am made in the same image, and however stupendous the disparity we belong to the same category.

And if I am made in God's image, I shall be able to interpret the voice of God as it addresses me. The converse and blending of spirit with spirit is possible to those who possess those deep and essential elements of contact at the very root of their being.

No man can live in perfect contentment whose life contradicts a fundamental instinct. The man born to be a great poet or artist or statesman, with intuitive qualifications for enchaining a multitude, can never find satisfaction in an obscure sphere in which those instincts are mortified and suppressed. A man with social dispositions and leanings can never find rest of soul as solitary anchorite or Trappist monk, or fakeer vowed to lifelong dumbness. Romulus, with great imperial instincts in his soul, could never have passed a contented life in the mountain lair, where the she-wolf is said to have suckled him. All these might more readily attain rest and contentment of soul than you who are made in God's image without daily speech and companionship with God.

In the apse of St. Sophia's, Constantinople, the guide points out a place where there is a hidden face

of Christ portrayed by some early Christian artist. When the Mahommedan conqueror possessed himself of that noble Christian temple, he ordered all Christian symbols to be effaced. This beautiful head of Christ was covered over with canvas. By gazing steadily at the canvas the visitor can assure himself that there is a sacred painting behind it. Perhaps the colours have stained the threads of the canvas faintly, or the interstices have been dragged apart and given pin-point views of the picture, but there it is. When the Christian conqueror again enters the gates of Constantinople the canvas will doubtless be torn away, and this bit of early Christian art be brought to light and restored.

And in spite of the riot and triumph and sacrilege of sin, there is some trace of the Christ-like in every man—some faint line or decaying feature that suggests the glorious whole once stamped upon him, and that shall yet be stamped upon him anew. Let the gates of the City of Mansoul be opened to the conquering King, and His hand shall strip away the sins that hide God's glory in these fleshly temples, and the resplendent image of God shall be seen in men once more.

XV.

REASON OVERTHROWN AND RECROWNED.

"Casting down imaginations (reasonings) and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."—2 COR. x. 4.

"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect."—1 COR. ii. 6.

"He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."—1 COR. ii. 15.

IN the chapters from which these texts are taken does not the apostle seem to teach that reason must be thwarted, abased, mortified before God's revelation of law and love in Christ Jesus can be established over a man's conscience and life? Does he not account this great faculty of the human soul as one of the high things repugnant to the knowledge of God which must needs be humiliated and overthrown in the spiritual warfare carried on by himself and his fellow-workers in the gospel? And if so, would it not sustain the position assumed by the controversialists of the Roman Catholic and kindred churches, and imply that we must believe on the authority of Church councils rather than by the help and illumination of the individual reason? Is not the tendency of his sayings to discredit and disparage human reason or the wisdom of this world as he there describes it?

He does teach assuredly that Christ is the Supreme Reason of God, and to that essential Reason our thoughts must be brought into complete captivity and allegiance. He never teaches, however, that the supreme and authoritative reason of Jesus Christ is incorporated in any one permanent type of Church organisation, and that it speaks there, and there alone. He implies, as does the Apostle Peter also, that the Divine Reason is established and enthroned within each individual believer. Every thought, he asserts, must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; but the captivity is that which comes, not by carnal warfare, not by outward force, not by the pressure of the iron hand, but by holy suasion, by a new logic of the spirit, by a process which touches a yet diviner reason in the soul of man. In this captivity human thought is not fettered, mutilated, suppressed, but brought into subjection to Christ's surpassing intellectual sovereignty. The war is not one of extermination against our intellectual faculties, but undertaken to deliver them from hallucinations, and to vindicate the authority of Him who is the supreme wisdom of God. In this spiritual warfare reason must be first cast down and then lifted up anew. It must share the processes of a man's conversion.

But the question arises: Is not judgment, reason, understanding one and the same thing in the converted and the unconverted man? Do not the powers of man's imperial intellect sometimes rise in faultless line above the ruin of his character, just as temple columns without an inch of variation from the plumb may sometimes be seen standing on the site of the city overthrown by earthquake? Before a man has bowed his will to the authority of Christ, his

spiritual King, his mental faculties are surely just as clear and strong and trustworthy as afterwards. You do not expect to see a compendium of arithmetic issued for schoolchildren with this recommendation, that its accuracy is guaranteed by the fact that a converted man compiled it whose reason had been supernaturally rectified. You do not expect to see text-books of science, on the title-page of which the competence of the author is certified by some degree in grace conferred by the Church to which he belongs, rather than by the hall-mark of a university diploma, or the gold medal of a learned society. Nobody would employ an accountant on the ground that at some spiritual crisis in his history he had been endued with heavenly wisdom and made less liable to error than his unregenerate neighbour. A converted man's text-book of geometry has no intrinsic superiority to that of an unconverted man. All mathematical truth is the same, and the discernment of its self-evidencing quality is instinctive with all minds alike.

To that we agree. But it must be remembered that in dealing with the conditions of our physical life the reason is not embarrassed by prejudices or misconceptions that arise in other parts of the nature. It starts from clearly-ascertained elements, and no room is allowed for divergent impressions, and mankind is at one about the foundation facts. When reason comes to deal with the things of God it has to do with data that lie outside the range of an unregenerate man's experience. It acts under conditions which very often mislead and baffle it, and it is susceptible to the influence of interested and misleading motives.

The data with which the reason of the natural man

sets itself to deal lie outside the range of his experience, or his apprehension of them is more or less dwarfed and defective.

Imagine a race isolated from the rest of the world, and condemned to live in a district of marsh and malaria. Ague becomes chronic and hereditary. In some members of the race there is clear mathematical capacity, but the use of rule and compass is unknown. The brain faculty is not at fault, and now and again there may be glimmerings of mathematical truth, and yet certainty and assured progress are quite impossible. The *data* from which the aspiring mathematician starts contain elements of mechanical error. What is axiomatic of straight lines in the abstract is scarcely axiomatic of the lines coming from these ague-twitched hands. The circles drawn wobble like the first essays of nursery art. Triangles are scarcely recognisable as such, and it would be impossible to classify them. The mathematical capacity of many members of the race may be of the highest order, and yet advancement is impossible because the elementary data available are defective. Before this latent mathematical capacity can be brought out and got to work you must equip with mathematical instruments, or cure the disease which afflicts with such riot and caprice.

It is impossible to get reason to deal with the things of God as though they were matters of strictly abstract truth. The only data by which human reason can in any degree apprehend God are supplied by the conscience, and the Fall has put upon those the stamp of partial errancy and imperfection. We may agree that conscience is the one thing in man's nature least impaired by the Fall.

We may agree further that it represents the voice of an unceasing inspiration from God within the soul of man, and yet the postulates of conscience are found tremulous, faulty, defective when reason tries to deal with them, because in the very process of becoming the subjects of conscious thought they have been touched and tainted with other tendencies and prejudices in man's nature.

Some time ago I sailed to a foreign port from one of the chief rivers in the north of England. The river was little better than a magnified sewer, ink-black in hue, and sickening in its loathsome odours. Heaps of cinder and rubbish seemed to form the banks through which it crept, and tall chimneys poured out sulphurous smoke on every side. It might have been the river of death drifting out to infinite desolations. Some little time after I saw that same stream at its sources. It was fed by springs of crystal that bubbled out of the green hill-side or fell untainted from the silent moors. Rich woods of pine and lush meadows flanked it. But between virgin source and hideous goal, mines and dye-works and manufactories had poured out polluting refuse and heaped high their piles of slag. As soon as the springs mix themselves with the main waters of the river, in spite of their original qualities, they are stained and tainted and poisoned so that neither sensitive fish nor fair reflection can live there. The river is a polished mirror at its source, and an opaque stew at its goal, in which scarcely any tint of sky or line of landscape can be seen.

And so with this Divine faculty of conscience in man. The data it offers become tinged by other streams of tendency in man's nature before they pass

into propositions with which reason can deal and take permanent shape in man's consciousness. Indeed passion begins to obscure the soul before reason takes its rise. All the streams of a man's secret life must be purified if that transparency of moral knowledge is to come, in which reason is able to see the reflection of God Himself. There must be the conquest and fresh subjection of the intellect to Jesus Christ. All that dims or distorts the representation of spiritual things must be removed before reason can be in a position to deal with spiritual facts.

Reason is Divine in its original qualities, but *it acts under surrounding conditions that often leave it pitiably at fault.* Not only are there tendencies within us which frustrate the integrity of its work, but it operates in a realm unfavourable to spiritual truth and insight. Beware of putting undue trust in its possibilities. The world's habits, traditions, interests, arrangements are adverse to the great principles it sets itself to verify. The other day I overheard the master of a pack of otter-hounds relating the adventures he had met in the pursuit of his favourite sport. Amongst other things he said he had once taken his hounds to hunt the otter in the Blyth, just below Morpeth. Several otters had been seen in the neighbourhood by trustworthy witnesses, but the enterprise was quite futile. The sewage poured into the river from Morpeth made scent almost impossible, and the cunning beasts were baffled in their quest. That was no reflection upon the eager, sagacious, well-trained dogs. The trail was neutralised by yet stronger odours. And so it is no disparagement of the reason to say that acting under such unwholesome conditions as we find around us it cannot always discover spiritual

truth. This wisdom is rightly described as the wisdom of this world, because it is environed by coarse and corrupt conditions. Nameless foulnesses taint the stream of modern thought and put our best faculties at fault as we follow after that which is good. It may sometimes happen that the deliverances of the press, the current opinions of the club, the pronouncements of science against faith, are not altogether impartial and unprejudiced. In the influences that go to make and uphold opinion you may sometimes find the grudge which a masked wirepuller, not quite immaculate, feels against a high and unbending Christian ethic. The natural reason is condemned to act in a region that is not infrequently foul, and its highest instincts are baffled. We need to come into a new realm, to be set free from this present evil world before reason can recover its discernment. Whilst it acts in an unregenerate world, and identifies itself with that world, it must needs be cast down and abased before it can be recrowned in some new and better kingdom.

Natural reason must be overthrown in the process of subjugating human nature to the will of Christ, not only because the data by which man seeks to know God are defective, and the realm in which he works is one of moral illusion, but because natural reason is often stimulated in its operations by a *vainglorious temper to which the knowledge of God is impossible.* It is strange the man of the world should be so slow to admit this, for no one can read the magazines of science and the transactions of learned societies without seeing how vanity and ambition bias the reason and spur it to construct or defend theories which in the end have to be pulled to pieces again. The

reason that works in the sphere of science needs a process of regeneration as sorely as that which works in religion, if it is to act with perfect modesty and in complete independence of the personal equation. Whilst these natures of ours are untouched with the grace of God we are always prone to magnify our gifts. We revel in the possession of physical strength or comely form if any shred of such things belongs to us. We revel in the power and opportunity to command if influence has been put within our grasp. And we revel in the sense of reason if we have special aptitude to seek out and collaborate and judge and compare. To discover God would be the crowning boast and glory of reason, but God has determined to make the knowledge of Himself to the intellect of man just what His forgiving love is to the conscience, a free gift; and proud human nature is too often unwilling to abide by God's decree. It says, "I must find out God if I am to believe in Him. This splendid faculty must have just opportunity for exercise in the process. I want to wear the knowledge of God as a trophy of intellectual skill and daring." When we thus seek to know God, and the temper of the unregenerate mind is ever such, we seek to know God for our own glory rather than for His, and in that case the knowledge of God becomes an essential idolatry. Christianity does not represent any element of unreason, for it is the voice of Infinite Reason, the wisdom that was with God from everlasting; but when natural reason is stimulated by motives of pride and vainglory, it must be overthrown before the true knowledge of God can come. Natural reason sometimes opposes and exalts itself against the knowledge of God, not because that knowledge is incon-

sistent with its own intellectual canons and processes, but because it is a condemnation of the motives under which natural reason acts. Before God can be known the pride and pomp and prowess of the old nature must be despoiled and cast down.

Christian faith does imply submission to authority, to that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself our wisdom, but not blind submission. Faith itself is an act of reason, of reason quickened, purified, reconstructed. But faith stretches far beyond reason, and bows to the rightful sovereignty of Him in whom all reason is perfect and absolute. It is in some such way as this that we act in the common things of life. We choose a professional counsellor by an act of reason. Credentials are put before us of the worth of which we can form a fairly accurate estimate. Up to a certain point we can test the knowledge of him into whose hands we are going to resign ourselves and appraise its trustworthiness. We have not time or opportunity or resource to verify his competence in every particular in which we may want to employ his knowledge, but we trust him because within certain lines we have been able to apply our canons of evidence. And so with us in our relation to Christ. When we disclaim all fleshly wisdom a higher reason is kindled within us, through which we discern Him who is the faithful and true Witness. Our every thought is brought into subjection to His authority. It is impossible for us to verify His word on each separate occasion, but because of what we discern through the new spiritual faculty which has arisen within us, we recognise the propriety of His rule over our faith and conscience. The finite reason cannot verify the Infinite Reason in the untold ranges of its

operation, but it can see a sufficiently large segment to know that it is Infinite Reason which confronts us, and to bow the head in homage.

II. But we are reminded once and again that *reason is to be restored to its headship over human life.* It is regenerated with the regeneration of man, enthroned anew in its ancient supremacy, and made to fill an honourable place in the scheme of Christian thought and conduct. We cannot suppose that this noblest of our faculties is to lapse and to pass away. A conversion that brings about that result would be as kind as the operation which left the hapless wayfarer between Jerusalem and Jericho stripped of his most costly possessions and utterly disabled. The naturalist is familiar with such a thing as "degradation" or "retrograde development." Some who did run well end by shutting themselves up in a form, or clinging helplessly to a solitary fragment of Christian truth. We cannot believe that is God's order for those who bear His similitude. Reason set free from the taint of carnal pride and renewed in all its functions and capacities becomes a nobler gift than ever, and adds unequalled distinction to the life it sways. Whilst Christianity begins with elements, the simplicity of which humiliates us, it does not stop there. There is no need to mortify the intellect when the pride that was once identified with it has been destroyed. If we settle down to mere elements only our life can never have apostolic strength and dignity and magnitude.

"We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." There can be no perfection that is not preceded by progress, and there can be no progress that is not attended by the continuous exercise of the reason.

You might as well expect an eagle to be made ready for higher flights by the plucking out of its pin feathers as look for spiritual progress in one whose reason has been restrained and aborted. A man cannot go on to perfection and leave his brains behind him. Advancement means the nurture and improvement of every part of the nature that has been changed and sanctified by the processes of redeeming love.

All Christ's teaching implies that a renewed reason is to have a most significant place in the life of His disciples. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who prescribed all the insignificant detail of a man's conduct, He deals in the broadest possible principles and entrusts the working out of formulæ of application to the individual judgment of the disciple. He has no ready-made saws and nostrums with which to equip His servants. And when the Spirit comes into the conscience to sustain and continue His work, the conscience so acted upon contents itself with reaffirming the essential distinctions between right and wrong, and must needs associate the reason with itself in applying the new ethic to the ever-varying circumstances in the history of the disciple and the changing needs and opportunities of the successive generations of men.

Reason has a conspicuous place in all those views of recompense which Christ puts before His disciples. The faithful servant is to rule over cities, the steadfast apostles to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel—all similitudes implying wisdom, reason, power of logic. The man whose best faculties have been neglected or suppressed is least fit to fill the seat of judgment and authority.

And then those vistas of fresh truth which Christ and His apostles open up to us are a distinct challenge to the exercise of the new and perfected reason.

A naturalist with a turn for anatomy discovered some years ago that the Tasmanian lizard has the eye of a molluscoid ancestor buried in the pineal gland. The singular fact is of course accepted as a conclusive argument in favour of evolution. After the creature had developed proper and finely-organised eyes of its own, the rudimentary eye that was indispensable to its less clever progenitors was infolded and hidden away in the tissues of the brain.

Now it is no reproach to us that in early stages of our religious development we should have looked at Divine things with the eyes of the Church Fathers, or the Reforming theologians, or the devout and scholarly divines who constructed our Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms. But it is a reproach to us if we forswear the very possibility of original insight. It is a reproach to us if we deny the illuminating unction given to all sincere believers, disparage the spirit of wisdom and revelation which is the heritage of the Church of all ages, and closing the eye of living and perfected reasoning, try to see things through the archaic eye of some primeval theologian of the molluscoid order. Theologians I hold in the highest possible honour, and find little to complain of in their work, but they are not substitutes for the Spirit of Light present in every true son of the light and of the day. Even the Tasmanian lizard does not shut its pair of modern eyes and try to see the world through the aborted organ buried in the pineal gland.

Faith is a phase of reason, and reason in even its lower forms is a phase of faith. Unbelief is

unreasonable temper, wickedness unreasonable life. The man who depreciates faith so that he may extol reason, conjures with words. Reason implies faith, faith in its own canons, and in the trustworthiness of the unknown power that ordains the laws of thought. How, apart from an instinct of faith, can a man know that reason is not a phantasm through which some superior power is hoaxing him? The man who is most confident of the sufficiency of reason as a guide of life has an unconfessed trust in the honour and good-will of the power that built the brain and ordained its functions. Beware, on the other hand, of the man who underestimates reason that he may exalt faith. The laws of conduct in practical life cannot be applied without the help of sanctified reason, and the man decrying it will probably be found tricking his own sense of right in the end, through sheer obliquity of intellect. Like David at Nob he feigns a pious madness and expects indulgence on that unworthy pretext. In the new spiritual world to which God's salvation introduces us we find that faith and reason tend to become more and more one and the same thing. There is no real divorce possible between the pair, although we have suffered them to drift into an ill-judged separation. The age of faith is the age of reason in the highest and best sense of the term, of reason purified, reinforced with new life, incited by holier motive, brought to fresh victory, crowned with better and more enduring honour. It is to the reproach of our Master and the detriment of human souls that we have allowed this false antithesis to prevail too long.

How can we influence the robust intellects of the world if we disparage reason? Men incomparably

influential in science and literature have been outside the Church, now and again through their own error, still oftener, I take it, through the error of a narrow and ignorant Church. Whilst I have little sympathy with the notion of making the Church a literary or scientific club, I have equally little sympathy with the notion which regards the Church as an institution licensed to frown on the union of knowledge and piety, and ban all expressions of the intellectual life. Never take up in relation to your religion the position of the old-fashioned farmers in relation to their servants, that common work will be better done the less educated people are. We want disciplined intellects alike in the offices of the Church and in the rank-and-file of its membership, and our religion is not quite so Divine as it ought to be, unless it brings the human mind to its very best. The disciples are to be in the end the saving salt of the world's scholars, philosophers, and statesmen, as well as of its rabble. We are not sufficiently genial to sanctified intelligence, nor do we adequately recognise our obligation to foster it, or we should not so often prove that we have no home to offer some of the best minds that come within our reach. Never dishonour Christ by putting up ideals of uncouth ignorance and mental stagnation in the Church. Never try to keep it a mere nursery for teaching elements by the rudest possible methods. If you are dull, indifferent to any enlargement of religious knowledge, content to remain in the limitations of the past, at least show a little discreet shame of it, and never glory in your humiliation. Do not complain that the truth goes over your head. Get out of your intellectual stoop and shuffle, and be full-grown men in Christ. Read

something. Plunge into a discussion with some fellow-disciple that will take you off the beaten tracks. Cultivate your mind so that you may have weight with the most thoughtful men brought within the reach of your influence, and that you may have something less mean to consecrate to Christ against the day when He shall present you before the glory of His Father.

XVI.

A CRITIC'S TEMPTATION.

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."—ECCLES. xi. 4.

THE same Solomon who praises the word in season, here speaks as though a man should not calculate too nervously the opportune moment for his almsgiving and his deeds of piety. In the one place he seems to advocate a critical, and in the other a careless, temper of mind. The paradox explains itself when we remember how he is guarding human nature on all its sides, and against the whole round of its fitful and inconsistent moods. Men are tempted to very opposite faults, against all of which alike they need to be made watchful—to frenzies of blind uncalculating endeavour on the one hand, and to a blighting languor, lassitude, and delay on the other. The practical, common-sense, duty-loving man is satisfied when the right month has come round for his toil. The critical, dainty, and luxurious man waits for an ideal fitness of day and hour and circumstance, which of course never comes, and lets slip his great opportunity.

We have always to watch against the insidious lee-drift in human nature. An element of imperturbable

inertness is intrenched within our souls which is apt to throw us disastrously out of time, and must always be reckoned with. Only those who take time by the forelock can succeed in their aspirations. In fulfilling the duties that God has devolved upon us we shall never meet with conditions of ideal suitability, nor shall we find around us guarantees of success verging on clear mathematical certainty. If we wait till all the factors of success come into the field and adjust themselves to our preconceptions, we shall shape for ourselves the grim destiny of the fool who has to "beg in harvest."

These short, sharp words etch for us the picture of a man in whom the spirit of criticism has destroyed the spirit of work. That type is becoming too common in the present day. There is not a little danger lest the world should be overrun by it. Captiousness may become an established habit, and issue in melancholy paralysis and failure.

A hypercritical outlook upon nature is scarcely one of the best equipments for successful farming. The captious tiller of the ground could show a strong case for making haste slowly and looking well before him, particularly in our uncertain climate. One sometimes wonders what secret mainspring keeps our agricultural industries in movement, for the weather forecasts are more frequently forbidding than not. The signs of the sky often spell neither seedtime nor harvest. The sun shines when there is need of rain, and torrents fall when there is need of sun, and the seasons seem to telescope each other like colliding trains. Seed has to be put in when there seems nothing in the air to make it germinate, and sheaves have to be snatched out of the fields in the pauses of a deluge.

Winds set from the wrong quarter, and blizzards come as unwelcome substitutes for zephyrs. A man with the critical faculty abnormally developed had better not be a farmer, in our capricious latitude at least. But as a matter of fact, weather forecasts prove a dead letter, and gloomy prognostications are falsified, and the sower sows in hope, and the reaper puts in his sickle with gladness. The talent for criticism, which the worker on the soil shares with the rest of us, finds its safety-valve in the proverbial grumble, and the red-faced man in drab slouches forth with his seed basket, or, braving falling glass, harnesses his sleek horses to the reaping machine. He is moved by a sense of duty, braced by a cheery faith, and he cannot suffer himself to relapse into a creature of dyspeptic outlooks, a witless weakling terrorised into paralysis by brief frowns of Nature.

In works of philanthropy and religion, as well as in art and literature, criticism has an indispensable function to fulfil. We must always test where possible the ideas with which we work, and the conditions under which we bring those ideas to bear. The husbandry that takes no account of the succession of the seasons, and makes no wise selection of its seed, can never rise above the level of fruitless imbecility and barbaric pauperism.

One of the most famous of recent English writers has said, "Byron had inventive power, but his work is not enduring because he lacked the critical faculty. Goethe was both critical and inventive, and his work has the stamp of permanence." That canon may be fitly applied in the spheres of philanthropy and religion. There are men around us who work with untested ideas and under conditions of change, the

importance of which they cannot estimate. They have a place in religious life and service corresponding to that of Byron in the world of letters. There are others who use the critical faculty, but keep it within proper bounds, and their work endures. They fill in the Church a place corresponding to that of Goethe in literature. The Apostle Paul had some such types in mind when he spoke of those who built with "wood, hay, and stubble," and those who built "with gold, silver, and precious stones." That man will leave coarse, unstable work behind him who goes into life's harvest-field with an outfit of untested ideas and unproved convictions. Many zealous and active souls would be improved and their work gain a higher value if they had just a little dash of the critical temper. We sometimes find men getting to work upon an audience of susceptible children or illiterate children of a larger growth, and trying to declaim them into religion. Their method is to terrorise without laying the basis of conviction, to terrorise in some cases by materialising the solemn mysteries of retribution, and giving pen-and-ink sketches of the devil at home, and then they take to themselves the flattering unction that "they have been preaching the blessed gospel." Their work is not preceded by a conscientious use of the faculty of judgment or criticism, and they ignore the place of that faculty in others. Sadly unsound and unstable is the work done by all such, a work of hay and stubble and rotten wood. It seems to me that Wesley had the critical faculty and Whitefield partly lacked it, and that is the reason why the work of the one surpasses and outlasts the work of the other.

The great modern peril, the peril of the generation

that will be to the front ten or fifteen years hence, is lest criticism should absorb so much of the sap and vigour of the soul that activity and outward movement will be completely deadened. We bid fair to have before long a society the great aim of which will be mutual censorship. The revised catechisms of the next century, instead of declaring that man's chief end is to glorify God, may lay it down with dogmatic clearness that his chief end is to spy out the flaws of his neighbour and criticise his neighbour's neighbour and arbitrate upon the whole scheme of things at large. A barren epoch that, less fruitful of good than the epochs of prehistoric rudeness.

It is necessary that the builder should have all the sand he puts into his mortar well riddled, but if every carter and hodman and bricklayer were seized with a mania for using the sieve and doing nothing else the next generation would be homeless. It is necessary that every yard of steel on our railways and every bolt and girder in the bridges that span our rivers should be tested by sample in the laboratory before it leaves the works; but if every puddler and navvy and platelayer and fireman were to turn to such work for the rest of his days, the next century would not have so much progress to show as this. It is necessary for every important corporation to appoint a chemist and inspectors to watch over the food supplies of the city, but if every citizen were to set to work with test-tubes we might soon find ourselves in a state of famine.

Not a few of the rising minds around us seem to think that their one vocation is to use sieve and torsion balance and test-tube year in and year out, and to do nothing else. The mania threatens to

become epidemic, and in that case the great works of moral and social edification that have been the glory of the past will be stopped. In thousands of instances the actor with his glorious possibilities is eaten up by the carping censor installed within him. The faculty of clear judgment which God gave us so that our work might become sound and strong degenerates into querulous palsy. The scrutiny of wind and sky becomes so nervous and minute that the man passes into the ignoble ranks of the do-nothings.

In the chapter before us Solomon is speaking primarily of the exercise of *beneficence to the poor.* If we grow hypercritical in this field of service we should learn to suspect ourselves, for we shall do little to lessen the sum of human woe. We need to keep a careful eye on the men and the societies whose special function is to track out imposture. Promiscuous giving is a crime. Every form of make-believe distress ought to be hunted down with exemplary severity. We have to defend the good name of the virtuous poor, which the golden rule makes as sacred as our own, and the worthless recipient of alms spreads abroad the un-Christlike impression common enough with some of us, that it is a sin and a shame to be poor. The impostor robs, too, not so much those of us who relieve him, who can perhaps bear the loss, but starving innocents to whom open-handed help is due. In works of this sort the sharp, far-searching eye has its place, but beware of being all criticism and nothing else. When a man pours through glib lips long stories of the different forms of imposture that have come under his immediate observation it is always an ominous sign. You will never get anything out of a man who is

eloquent on those lines. You could scarcely reach his purse by an autopsy. He would be sure to outwit you. The communities that are subject to fits of detective mania always grow stony-hearted. In trying to check the waste of beneficence I am afraid we may sometimes confirm not a few selfish people in their mean inaction. If a critic overpass a certain point in his zeal he always puts himself in line with the miserliness of human nature. He may stop the hypocrisy of some amongst the avaricious poor, but he at the same time fosters the parsimonies of the grasping rich. The penurious and the supine always welcome him as an ally. Do not suppose that any amount of individual or organised scrutiny and examination, any social rescue schemes however sober, any programme of Good-Samaritanism however far-sighted, will be able to get wind and cloud exactly right for your sowing. You may be found doing what Solomon deprecates—setting up conditions to ensure success that are impracticably perfect, and in this way you will end by being the friend of inaction.

And does not this temper of exaggerated criticism help to *weaken and destroy much of our religious work?* Men become morbidly captious on doctrinal questions. It is well they should test their religious beliefs and examine with fearless honesty the history of the sacred documents that have been potent forces in shaping those beliefs, but they seem to pass the best part of their lives in this assay work which has become a monomania with them. The "Higher Criticism" is looked upon as a flag of truce, during the display of which the struggle against devilishness and irreligion must be held in suspense. I meet many a thoughtful and cultivated young man with whom the idea that

the old theology has gone into the melting-pot and the new has not yet emerged has become a debilitating hypochondria. Now the crisis to which we are come is not so revolutionary as these philosophical dyspeptics assume. We shall not have to change a tithe of that which worshippers of modern progress declare must be thrown overboard. I believe there will be far less to change in the theology than in the science of the future. The change will prove itself for the most part a fresh and more scientific phrasing of substantially the old truth. The revolutions which are identified with the names of Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Spencer, are portentous in comparison with the doctrinal adaptations which gather around the names of Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Maurice, and contemporary theologians. And history will repeat itself. Our sciences will be subjected to a far more radical upheaval and readjustment than the systems of Christian doctrine and morals. The worker in science does not excuse himself on the ground that so little is absolutely fixed, and great changes will occur in the near future. He works all the more eagerly. The physician does not retire from practice on the ground that so little is known of the theory of the methods by which many of our drugs act. He is ever alert to obey the call of suffering. It is the excess of morbid criticism which leads men to the conclusion that theology is in a transition stage, and that Christian work is all but impossible for the time being.

The *social outlook is scrutinised* in the spirit of morbid criticism. We must have legislative reforms if we are to feel any kind of security against the complete destruction of the harvests for which we

sow. A legion of malign influences is let loose upon our most sacred work. We want laws that shall be Christian in aim and practical effect: the properties that make physical and moral health impossible and degrade the family life must be rebuilt, untended children must be taken from the custody of drunken and profligate parents, the licensed victuallers must be brought to terms and made a little less almighty, our streets must be cleared of all that offends the eye and taints the soul, or we might as well shut up our missions and Temperance meetings and Sunday-schools. The fruit of our tenderest sympathy and our most passionate prayer and our holiest love is blighted by the gigantic chartered temptations that overshadow it. The record of past backsliding and disappointment is heartrending indeed. We might as well fold our hands, for there is nothing but frustration before us, unless the legislature will create more promising conditions of work. Agreed. But is not your criticism disease, if it arrest work?

The national temperament seems to be less religious. Men are passing into new psychological conditions in which they cannot be touched by the ancient forces of revival. They grow imperturbably reticent about the soul and its welfare, and would appear to think little of its interests. We shall have to wait till the cycle of emotion returns, if it has not sped for ever, and the human heart recovers its tenderness and infantile simplicity, before there can be much prospect of fruitfulness in the old paths of religious service. For the present there seems to be little promise of success, and we might as well wait the turn of the tide before troubling ourselves. Ought not the inaction into which we have argued ourselves

make us distrust that verdict upon contemporary life postulated in our stupefying logic?

The ecclesiastical outlook is not reassuring. The competition of the churches differs but little from commercial rivalry. The so-called "sects" are devouring each other like predatory fish, and the State Church, like some lusty old shark, is making wide its mouth to take in the entire shoal. Work that is distinctively spiritual in its qualities must be hard and vexatiously unremunerative under such conditions. Agreed that there is some faint colour of truth in the reproach, but is not your criticism self-condemned by the inaction to which it leads?

Other observers watch the sky that overarches *the local Church life* with abnormal acuteness. The atmosphere is not quite so sweet and bracing as it might be. Every department of Church enterprise ought to be more effectively manned. The administration of this or the other interest is not quite so faultless as could be wished. Here there is officiousness; there lassitude; and no one seems to strike the happy mean. And discipline seems to have become a dead letter. It is little better than the stuffed dog we see on the mantel of the sporting man, and is useless to guard the door. Agreed. Criticism has its function here, and we shall never get a healthy and a stimulating environment till it has done its work. Come and give a helping hand in improvement and reform. Unless you are prepared to do that your criticism is passing into the captious and paralysing stage.

The ministry does not lend itself to aggressive evangelism. We would do more if we could have a new type of man in the pulpit for the fortnight. We would crowd the meetings for prayer then. Possibly

so. But if you were to keep him in the pulpit for three months instead of a fortnight he would become as tame and unromantic as the rest. You are watching sky and wind till you watch yourself into hopeless petrifaction. The true function of criticism is to make work clearer and stronger and more enduring, but you are prostituting criticism if you substitute it for action and allow it to become your goal. The only man who has the right to criticise is the man who strains all his energies to do something. Your lavish, interminable criticism is a perversion of that right, for it ends in ignoble laziness. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow," &c.

How the most precious lives the world has had in it would have been spoiled and rendered worthless unless the spirit of criticism had been kept under the severest restraint! Jesus Christ possessed an insight that might have tempted Him to discouragement in any age, and that compelled Him to see things in men which must have been an unknown oppression to Him as He "went about doing good." He might have spent His days in captiousness and distant censorship, for "He knew what was in man, and needed not that any should tell Him." His temptations to criticism were a thousandfold greater than ours. How corrupt the age in which He lived! At every step there were the materials for a morbid analysis of human nature that might have sickened Him for a lifetime and driven away every thought and hope of uplifting mankind. What subjects challenged His notice that might have nauseated His heart and dissuaded it from love, and have forbidden His redemptive enterprises! But the critical faculty was held in check by the higher faculty of love. Under all con-

ditions He was content to sow the seed, and now the fields are white unto harvest, and we, the reapers of the later day, may rejoice with Him who came forth to enrich our earth with such marvellous fruit.

How the life of the Apostle of the Gentiles might have been robbed of its chief worth if the spirit of criticism had prevailed within it! Strange chapters of life were opened up to the apostle in his journeyings amongst the churches, and he saw human nature again and again in its humiliating undress. And he was a keen judge of character and conduct. If the tempers appealed to by this side of his experience had become supreme, how much poorer the world would have been! His inducements to hypercriticism were just as strong as those of the smartest and most inactive young cynic in our midst. And the highest life of possibility may be spoiled by the temper which is possibly spoiling yours and mine.

Let us probe this temper a little more deeply and see what are its underlying characteristics.

Is not this hypercritical temper very often *the refuge of covert unbelief?* If every factor of success out of the round hundred were present, what scope could you have for faith in the covenant blessing of the unseen God? It is the missing factor, the one unpropitious omen on the sky-line, the unfriendly rasp of the bleak east wind, that brings you back to the illuminated gospel of the bow,—the pledge of an unfailing seed-time and harvest; and shuts up to the faithful love that can never fail. God would simply put His own demand of faith out of doors if there were no rasping wind in the seed-time and no drifting cloud-shreds and drenching tempests in the harvest. Were He to make your spring a three-months' May-

time and your autumn a golden September without a cloud, His throne would be shrouded, His sceptre put into commission, and Himself displaced. The chances are that in an environment so uniformly propitious we should relapse into the old Aryan idolatries and become worshippers of the sun and the wind and the blue sky rather than of the unseen love and faithfulness that ordain and control and modulate the complex forces of nature. Do not seek to guide yourself by outward signs. That is walking by sight and not by faith, and such activity will be as barren as the doubting prayer. The temper of chronic criticism, which is perhaps your besetment, the despairing captiousness which is such an easy habit to acquire, the vague forebodings that lock up your affections and your energies, and debar you from the clear duty of the hour, are symptomatic of a suppressed unbelief that frustrates the blessed promise of your life and grieves and dishonours the faithful God who is putting you to the proof.

Is not this deep-seated temper *one of the disguises of selfish indolence?* The fact is, if you look clear down into the dim places of the heart you will be bound to confess that you are disinclined to work. Indolence is always ingenious enough to frame some kind of impeachment against both its tools and its opportunities. It is singularly subject to an affection known amongst doctors as hyperesthesia. Some insects can feel with their fine antennæ the slightest movement in the air caused by the hand which is coming near to strike or capture them. The acute perceptions you sometimes show of the defective and inhospitable conditions around you arise from your secret disposition to get away from the work

the Master has set you to do. For the spiritual laggard the wind will always be coming from the wrong quarter by half a point at least. If the disturbing element does not come of itself the idle man would rig up some sort of windsail to draw it. If there is no rag of vapour floating up from the west he would put his spectacles on unwiped, and then see the necessary patch of discouragement there to excuse from the sweat and strain of the harvest-field. By hook or by crook he is bound to see clouds that threaten with deluge his standing corn. The seed-basket on the barn floor and the reaping-hook on the wall excite within him a recoil comparable only to that of a mad dog from water. Sloth is a marvellous magician, and can create a stage tempest at will. It carries about its effectual medicines with it wherever it saunters. The Kaffir rain-doctor is quite outdone. This temptation to exaggerate discouragement and overstate the chances of failure arises from an insidious bias towards inaction. Fastidiousness will ever be fatal to success. A gloomy scrutiny of the conditions of religious work is deadening to the soul's highest action. It would be no slight omen that would pull you up in your money-making. Sicknesses, disappointments, bad debts, treacheries do not arrest you there. However drastic your criticisms of men and things, you do not allow yourself to become paralysed. Be just as much a man in Divine things. The omens that cast you down and tempt to inaction will be dispelled by cheery toil.

And then is not this excess of the critical temper a *symptom of pride?* The fact of it is we want to do our work lulled by indulgent zephyrs and laved in luxurious sunshine because we have such mighty

ideas of ourselves. We are proud of our importance and of our fine-grained gentility, and think God ought to be only too happy to take us on as fair-weather labourers. We forget the high privilege of work and the boundless gain of its educating influence and discipline to ourselves. With the pride of princes we think we have every claim and title to perfect conditions. We might be so many Chinese emperors coming forth to lay a dainty hand upon the plough for a second or two, and so seal an honour upon agriculture that shall last for a twelvemonth. Our brother the Sun ought to smile, and our kinsman the Wind to breathe genial and flattering warmth, and all the forces of astrology be in delightful conjunction to do us honour. And instead of the glittering welcome there is depressing drizzle. The arrangements for our performances in the kingdom of heaven ought to be as complete as when the ruler of an empire upon which the sun never sets lays a foundation-stone, or turns the sod of a new railway, or unlocks with key of gold some new ward in a hospital. But the weather is a chaos of March and November. What a slight that the powers of the upper air should pay us no higher compliment than that! We shall feel ourselves justified in staying at home the next time. Dainty magnates that we are, we recoil from the idea of mere treadmill tasks, tasks that are all strain and sweat and struggle and fume, and of no interest at the time or of apparent profit afterwards. Be thankful you are on God's treadmill, if you can see your work under no nobler similitude, and not under His chariot-wheel. Do you deserve even that? Be content to sow in tears. "It is enough for the servant that he be

as his master." What right have you to laugh the round year through, or, failing that, to cease from toil? Pride rather than clear and reasonable judgment makes us clamour for perfect conditions of work.

When you look at the question from all sides, *would you like to have perfectly complaisant conditions for your work?* Do you not rather wish to have marked off in your life some little corner in which you can illustrate the fact that you trust God's nobility and faithfulness?

The work is scarcely worth the doing to which genial breeze and alluring sunshine woo us, for, taking human nature as we find it, such work is fated to be void of that faith which can alone make it acceptable. Your life task must be an inspiration of trust from within, not a prognostication by signs from without. These unpropitious factors in your work are a wisely-ordered part of the dispensation under which you are placed. Not in the springtime only, but down to the very last hour of the harvest, ugly signs will spring up to threaten the prosperity and gladness for which we look. As well as the thorn and thistle in the soil there will be hostile influences in the air to menace our best hopes with defeat and disappointment. We must sow and reap, not because fair weather invites us, but because the duty has been laid upon us by God.

Could you ever be educated into a true manliness and moral hardihood without the help of these unpromising factors with which you have to grapple? It is by the trying tasks to which an inward voice alone calls us that *God is seeking to rid us of our miserable effeminacies.*

The winds and the storms are after all more skilled in hero-making than the flowers and the sunshine. The tropics have never yet cradled a great and conquering race. Some one has said, "The black man has never built a city of stone, founded an empire, or created a literature." Where Nature yields everything without the importunity of toil, culture and muscle and brain rarely develop themselves. Alas for a man who can sleep all day long under a tree that feeds and clothes him upon a system of unlimited credit, and is a universal supply store minus the cash requirement. That man's master is not far off. The dominating races have always come swooping down out of the mists of the North. The earliest and latest conquerors of both India and China came from the North. The conquerors of France and Rome came from the North. The nations that have most truly conquered Britain came out of the ice of the North, and not from the sunny plains of Italy, and now out of the Scotch mists of the North phalanx after phalanx of thrifty and shrewd-headed men come to beat us again by the arts of trade and commerce. Ungenial conditions form the cradle in which strength, courage, endurance are bred and fostered.

God is more concerned to harden His workers into men of steel than to make the sky blue and the sunshine warm and the winds soft about them, and every stage of life a luxurious picnic. He does not forget the far-off harvest, but for the moment He seems to think more of the training and moral welfare of His workers. We must toil not to please ourselves, but because the duty is laid upon us, and its fulfilment will tend to assimilate us to the Divine character, and establish

for us honoured places in the Divine economies. God works under conditions that are not always genial or flattering. Think of His wasted charities of scent and bloom and ungathered fruit away from the walks of men. It is perhaps in this way only that He can show us how lavish is His love. And that we may rise into active unselfishness after His lavish pattern may sometimes explain His apparent harshness in withholding the things necessary to perfect and complete the conditions of our appointed tasks.

All true work involves at some point or other both a struggle with ourselves and with that which is external to ourselves. It is hard to be subjected to this constant stress and strain. We cry out against the everlasting tension of care and toil and conflict. There is always some evil and disheartening condition to be grappled with, and if instead of laying hands upon it we stand and gaze and think how formidable it is, and grow unduly and habitually critical, we condemn our lives to barrenness.

Men and women are not uncommonly met with who seek to escape the strain of difficulty and the temptation to foreboding by spasms of work at the seasons they think most opportune. They are birds of passage. They try to do and get good in a picked number of weeks in the year only, and the churches they dominate might almost close during the summer months. Between the spring and autumn equinoxes they rarely attend meetings for prayer or Christian fellowship. Now the almanack missions and revivals in which these people believe are not likely to yield solid and enduring good. We must not watch for the seasons. The falsest pretenders to usefulness in the Church are these spurt people.

"The Lord shall count when He writeth up His people" that the good of the world has been done not by those who act only under the influence of extraordinary movements, not by the busy bees of a shining revival hour, but by the year-in and year-out people. Woe to the man who works only under those special conditions of sky and atmosphere he arranges for himself, and thinks success at other times an off-chance! He is not likely to come forth jubilant from the Lord's presence after the great reckoning.

You may wait too long and too fastidiously for the serious and intelligent moment which is to be the crisis in the religious history of the child. You may wait too long for the hour of chastened thought which is the acceptable time in the destiny of the man or woman who waits to be helped at your side. Act from within. Do not wait till events compose themselves into a sign of absolute and unconditional promise. The awaiting success will be more than ideal, but the antecedent conditions of it will ever be far less than ideal. God's harvest is no off-chance, but certain as the throne over which the covenant bow spans itself. The drawbacks that deter us are phantasms and fantasies. The harvest that beckons us will be richer than the earth and the fulness thereof, and the songs that celebrate its ingathering shall be heard when the trumpet that wakes the dead has died again into silence and the crash of dissolving worlds is heard no more. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters."

XVII.

THE MONOPOLIST AND THE PROSELYTISER.

"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."—MATT. xxiii. 13, 15.

SOME of the warnings addressed by Jesus Christ to the Jewish sects and parties of His own time, it is often assumed, have no special relevance in our own time and nation. But if we listen for the deepest note in these warnings we shall find some obscure but by no means unimportant chord in our lives touched. The unchastened passions animating those Jewish parties which set themselves to frustrate the work of Jesus Christ are still active in the world, and in one form or another may perhaps be struggling within our own hearts for expression. Who of us does not need to watch lest he should become a stumbling-block? To say that we never hinder others from entering the kingdom of heaven is to affirm that we are without fault. Our faults never concern ourselves alone, for no man can isolate his action and its influence. He cannot withdraw from the social relationships in which he

is placed and put himself in a position corresponding to that of the experimenter in amateur science who mounts a glass-legged stool so as to break his electric continuity with the earth. Contacts of far-ranging significance are inevitable. We are always touching others, and unless we are filled with the spirit of faith, meekness, love, and self-renunciation, the touch will carry with it shocks to the spiritual life of those who are about us. The man who will not go into the kingdom of heaven himself and cultivate all the tempers befitting those who are its inheritors is always a stumbling-block to others. He who professes piety or seeks a reputation for it, and is plainly and deliberately inconsistent with his profession, makes many to stumble, and leaves them unhelped whilst the great Helper is near.

I. *Let us look at Christ's condemnation of the monopolists.*

A few weeks before this last scathing manifesto in the Temple Christ directed against the scribes and the lawyers on the east of the Jordan a similar reproach. On the earlier occasion we catch in a brief metaphor the speaker's own explanation of the way in which the scribes and lawyers closed the kingdom of heaven against the masses. They did it by taking away "the key of knowledge." If you look for a moment at the condition of things in that transition period you will see the force of the charge. The language in which the earlier books of the Old Testament were written had been so modified and enlarged through the contact of the Jews with the outside world that the sacred Scriptures were no longer intelligible to the common ear. The Hebrew of Moses and the Prophets would have sounded stranger to the

ear of the Jew of Christ's time than the English of Tyndall's Bible to an average congregation to-day. These lawyers were the authorised official interpreters of the sacred texts. It was their duty to transliterate the pure Hebrew of the old records into the prevailing dialect of the period. In fact they were walking dictionaries, and inasmuch as it is impossible for a man to find his way into the treasures of a foreign literature apart from the help a dictionary will give him, the common people were more or less dependent upon the service rendered by these living lexicons. If they were to find their way to faith in Christ's Messianic office and power, it must be through the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures, and they could only get at the inner meaning of the Scriptures by the help of these official linguists. Had they been so disposed, the scribes could have weighed Christ's claim in the balances of the Old Testament, and have settled it at once, both for themselves and others. But they hid away the key. They had not popularised the Old Testament teaching on this and many kindred subjects, and had no wish to popularise it. Not only were they unwilling to enter the kingdom themselves, but they tried to make a close monopoly of their knowledge, and would not produce the key and open the gates to the masses.

Of course there were those in the Middle Ages who were the first cousins of these lawyer monopolists. Before the times of Wycliffe and Tyndall and Luther the Bible was not translated into what is called the vulgar tongue. If we except from the reckoning one city in Italy of democratic temper where the Church authorities were compelled to give way and permit the local patois to be used in the

services of the Church, hymns and liturgies and collects were in Latin. The key was hidden away by proud and crafty and self-indulgent priests. But the Middle Ages, with all their limitations and servitudes, are gone, and no one does that kind of thing now. Are we sure of that? Is there no tendency to shut up the gospel? And if we shut up the gospel from a single human soul, can we claim that we ourselves are entering into the kingdom, the kingdom of universal love? The classes around us speak very different languages, as divergent in some cases as those of the Jews gathered together from all parts of the known world on the day of Pentecost. It is to be hoped a time will come when the use of provincialisms will have disappeared, for they are often the badge of serfdom and inferiority. But even then we shall not have got rid of Babel. The multiplication of Babel tongues continues to go on in ways that dismay us. Every new branch of knowledge creates a new development of language. Every industrial pursuit seems to give rise to phrases of more or less limited currency. Fashion insists that its votaries shall confess themselves by using upon every suitable occasion the catch-words it may have chanced to stamp and approve. The speech of a man often bewrays the particular print from which he feeds his vocabulary. The discourse of different classes runs off in widely different grooves. It is as restless as outpoured quicksilver, and cannot be tied up to special forms. And if that is so, the gospel will need changed methods of presentation in different times and amongst different classes. The essential doctrine that saves is unalterable, but because of the ever-changing speech of those to whom

it is addressed, it will have to be set forth in new dialects and by indefinitely adapted methods of interpretation.

When men need direction into the kingdom of God they are sometimes pointed to those *creeds of the early Church the acceptance of which is usually regarded as a mark of catholicity*. The truth which will guide men aright, it is said, finds perfect expression there. The Church is a custodian of these formularies rather than a teacher of truths that demand new presentations with the changing years. These ecclesiastically-minded people tell us it might be as well even to dispense with the pulpit altogether in our modern churches. Those who go into cathedrals for the liturgy and anthem, and come out before the sermon begins, are guilty of no impropriety, and have a very proper conception of what a Christian service should be. God forbid that a word should be spoken against these creeds, but the gates of the kingdom will remain closed to many if they are pointed to these formularies as the Church's last and only word, and told that the key is there. These expressions of faith agreed to by the early Christian councils are landmarks of controversies some of which are entirely of the past, and may never recur, and not a few expressions in the creeds can only be understood through a knowledge of bygone controversies. The language, moreover, is not always language in which religious questions are discussed to-day. New controversies have arisen in which men must have the note of guidance they will find only in a living voice. To point to the creeds and to refuse to touch questions of belief in their present-day aspects is either an expedient to hide incompetence or an artifice to veil schisms of thought, the very first hint

of which would turn the boast of catholicity into a burlesque. The creeds, however much we may venerate them, are not an adequate setting forth of the truth of salvation for the modern inquirer. They contain but do not adequately illustrate, far less exhaust that truth. Creeds and confessions do not define all the courses along which we ought to teach, nor absolve us from our duty of addressing the age through its own formularies of thought and by its own repertory of metaphors. To refuse to modernise the phrasing of these creeds, which to not a few people around us are pure Hebrew, is to take away the key of the kingdom.

The temper of spiritual pride sometimes tends to make the monopolist. With not a few self-complacent people religion is apt to degenerate into a set of phrases that through frequent repetition become quite unmeaning. The phrases referred to may be perfectly evangelical and in harmony with the Scriptures, or perhaps even a Bible conglomerate; but they are altogether aloof from the speech of the reader in modern literature, as much so as the pure Hebrew to the people of Christ's times. But these misguided souls think the world will come to accept the ideas represented by these phrases without any translation into the current speech of the day. "Only believe, and you shall be saved," is the one refrain heard in every Mission Hall we visit, and from the lips of every Salvationist who stands at the street corner. A most excellent message, and one with Christ's authority behind it. But a bald statement of that sort is not intelligible to reading and thinking men. You have to teach both the ethic and reason of faith to those whose thought and speech are essentially modern.

Some of the watchwords of past revivalism are as unintelligible to modern ears as Syriac. Unless you find out what you mean by your religious watchwords, and make them intelligible to the age, you may fall under Christ's condemnation. The Church is apt to become a close brotherhood in which an unknown tongue is spoken, and the outside world is forgotten which needs an interpreter. "In some parts of Africa," says the late Dr. Moffat, "new languages, or dialects scarcely distinguishable from languages, spring up in a very curious way. The young and middle-aged men of a tribe are called away to war, and their wives go with them to carry and cook their food and undertake commissariat duties. The children are left in charge of the toothless old grandmothers of the tribe, with the result that they acquire pronunciations scarcely intelligible to their own fathers and mothers when, after an interval of years, they return from the wars." And within the Church foreign languages grow up expressive of very true religious ideas and experiences, that have no cogency in the outside world. The phrases to which some estimable Christian people give currency in their devout mumblings are unmeaning to the average magazine or newspaper reader of the day. And some of these complacent pietists are content to mumble their shibboleths from generation to generation, in the hope that if they mumble long enough the world will come to understand them.

Each religious community seems to evolve idioms that are as little understood by the great world outside as the advertisement in cipher sometimes appearing in the newspaper, or the telegraphic code used by a great business house in communicating with its various branches or agencies. The language of

evangelical Christianity needs new and living interpretations many times in the course of a century if men are to be guided into the kingdom. Your less devout neighbours do not understand your watch-words, and you must translate into the language of common life. A man who limits himself to stock phrases takes away the key. If you feel such self-satisfaction in the religious positions you have reached, and are not anxious to make these positions clear to onlookers, you become exclusive, and it is open to question whether you are entering into the kingdom of heaven yourself.

And *the genius of conventionality sometimes makes us monopolists in another direction.* Our pride in mere taste and propriety may tempt us to take away the key of knowledge from not a few whose characteristic modes of conversation are apt to set our teeth on edge if we are unduly fastidious. There are dense masses around us who do not talk our dialect. It would perhaps be difficult to name any known book that represents the forms of speech current amongst them. Now and again representatives of these sections of the population are coaxed into a place of worship, and the preaching is beyond their range. Well, we must see to it that we do not shut the gospel from them by couching it in a language that is almost as unintelligible as the mother tongue of Moses and Samuel. Let us welcome the work of those who can preach the gospel in the language of colliers, bargees, dock-side labourers, and corner-men. There are hundreds of people who will never be reached unless they are reached through a dialect we have never learned, and that we should be rather shocked to hear spoken in church. Remember the

disciples of Christ are organised into a fellowship to preach the gospel by any and every means to those who have not heard it, and not chartered into an academy to keep up certain conventional standards of taste. Do not let us condemn all departures from our standard of genteel and decorous speech. Our pride in cultivated and stately diction, and our assumption that the gospel must always be wedded to it, may sometimes betray us into the sin of taking away from many of our fellow-countrymen the key of knowledge.

The resentment we feel when asked to place the inner facts of our own spiritual life and history at the service of others tends to bring us into the condemnation Christ pronounced upon monopolists. How often are we found joining hands with those who discourage the spirit of personal testimony! We are ready to say that those around us have no more right to the secret of our spiritual life than they have to the secret of our past sin, whatever that may be. We try and justify our exclusiveness upon the most sacred of all questions by asserting that the tendency of culture is to induce reserve. Educated people recoil from the thought of giving those clear, simple religious testimonies in which less educated people seem to delight. The more a man comes to know, the less confident he is apt to feel about himself, and the more offensive anything savouring of religious boastfulness will seem. Well, if to give a testimony that will guide and help others is to boast of our own achievements, we have every right to withhold it, but if it is to speak of the achievement of God's grace and power within us, it is difficult to see how we can justify ourselves to our Lord and Saviour in refusing that testimony. Now the world, in its present moods

of unbelief, needs clear, intelligent testimony to those facts of the spiritual life which are verified in the inner history of every penitent believer in Christ; and whilst there is unbelief that is wilful, proud, God-despising in its characteristic spirit, there is no doubt that a vast proportion of the existing unbelief could be removed at once if every disciple of Jesus Christ who has a living experience of His saving mercy and power would clearly and intelligently state that experience to his neighbour. The testimony to those great spiritual truths that have been verified within, must not be limited to select circles of friends or fellow-believers, or secretly kept within our own hearts. We are ready enough to state the theories of the Christian faith, to quote texts of Scripture, and, if there is reproach to be met, to let it fall upon the Bible, to debate at any length with those who will discuss Christian evidences, but the need of the hour is clear, strong, intelligent testimony. We can unlock gates of brass and remove bars of iron for not a few by personal testimony; and those who make a secret of their religious life are apt to finish up by finding that it is shrinking after a somewhat singular fashion, and perhaps by losing it altogether. They have brought themselves under the anathema Christ directed against the monopolist.

II. But the *proselytiser* no less than the monopolist falls under Christ's scathing condemnation. These indictments may seem to be more or less inconsistent with each other, inasmuch as the proselytiser does display zeal of a kind, whilst the monopolist is characterised by an utter lack of zeal; but the proselytisers are only the monopolists in a new relation; they have formed themselves into a close ring or

corporation, and they declare that the benefits of the truth are not to be freely enjoyed, but to be enjoyed only by those who will attach themselves to their particular party.

The word of Jesus has created more missionaries and mapped out for their footsteps wider circles of travel than the word of any other historic religious teacher. Is it not somewhat strange to hear one who was destined to owe His incomparable fame to the restless zeal He Himself had fostered in His disciples speak in these terms of condemnation about the proselytising zeal of others? Did not He who hurled this woe at the scribes inculcate proselytism, and was He not Himself the most colossal proselytiser the world has ever seen, if at least we accept the term under which the critics of Christianity describe its aggressive work? Was all proselytism condemned in these words, or that practised by the scribes only? Christ surely was prepared to apply His principle with the utmost impartiality. He could not forget His own golden rule, and was bound to be as tolerant of the activities of scribes and Pharisees as of His own disciples. We are told by some that Christ condemned proselytising zeal in this particular instance because it asked men to pledge themselves to the observance of an elaborate discipline, the fulfilment of which was quite impossible, and the mere profession of which was bound to leave them hypocrites. Christ's condemnation has a wider and deeper ground than that, and we are bound to find out what He meant by proselytism, and how the world-wide commission afterwards given to His own disciples might be enthusiastically fulfilled without bringing the disciples under the blame of His own words.

How was the so-called "proselytism" of Christ's disciples distinguished from that of the scribes and Pharisees? For those at least who are willing to see the distinction, is not the spirit of proselytism separated by a mark wider than the widest sea, from the spirit of a holy and an unselfish evangelism? The motive of the proselytiser is coarse and sordid. He seeks the interest of self, the influence of party, the co-operation of men who will be his instruments. The motive of the true evangelist is unmixed love, and he ceases to be an evangelist when the secondary motive comes in. Proselytism has nothing to teach, and it teaches nothing; it is zeal for frivolous detail. Evangelism has light to diffuse; it is zeal not for the mere accidents of a system, but for its saving essence. These scholarly men Christ condemned, refused to teach Messianic truth to those who were at their own doors, but they were going far afield to enlist allies and confederates. A true evangelism seeks not the partisan, but the disciple.

Christ minimised the measure of outward change He made binding on those who wished to believe in His name, and asked nothing but what was demanded by the honest logic of His great principle of love. The spirit of proselytism, on the other hand, forbade the use of Christ's name to those belonging to another fellowship. Christ was content that men should use His name wherever they might be, and come under the mighty spiritual influences inherent in that name, without any change in their outward vocation or relationship. After the death and resurrection of their Master the disciples still visited the temple, a place from the associations of which all their natural instincts would repel them. Was it that till the

doctrine of the Cross was unfolded they could not rest without putting themselves under the sheltering influences of the old ritual sacrifices, or was it that they were carrying out the spirit of their Master, and showing that, under even anomalous ecclesiastical relationships, men might possess the spirit of His peace? If His disciples were to become a separated community it must be by a process of providential growth, and in obedience to the genius of His teaching, for generations afterwards they were still attendants in the synagogues. With that incomparable insight by which He was distinguished, Christ recognised that every true moral change must start from within. He wanted submission to His spiritual sovereignty, and not partisanship from those to whom He extended His grace and approval.

These words seem to take cognisance of the fact that *every change which is not an outcome of new conviction and new life is evil.* The change that is due to secondary motives, and not to the pressure of a great moral principle upon the conscience, can work nothing but mischief to the character. By a process of transplantation you subject the human soul to as many fatal risks as a delicate plant or tree. If you sow the wheat that has been raised in one zone in a belt of country where the average summer temperature is ten or twelve degrees lower, the harvests for two or three years will be of the scantiest. The grain resents the change, and only adapts itself by slow degrees to the conditions of a new soil and atmosphere. Some plants absolutely refuse to be transplanted, and, like many of the prisoners in the old slave ships, commit suicide on the voyage. In introducing the blue gum tree into Europe and the

cinchona tree into India, it was found that one or two only out of many varieties would survive under the new conditions. And even these were far from healthy at the outset, and needed very watchful nursing. The artificial and unnecessary change into which men and women may be tempted, proselytism without inward conversion, is always perilous, and may not infrequently prove spiritually fatal. Christ did not ask every healed man to join the community which followed Him from place to place. He was quite content that a man should have faith in His name, and retain for the time being his fellowship with the communities which arose in connection with the work of John the Baptist. If one could cast out devils in Christ's name, he had more faith than the twelve always possessed, and there was no need for him to accept the dictation of James and John. The disciples wanted to transplant him forthwith, and make him of their party, but the great Master of the disciples was a believer in those inward spontaneous processes by which a man is trained, saved, and led out into the light. Change is only safe when it is the issue of a great inworking spiritual conviction. Ecclesiastical migrations do go on from time to time for which no good reason can be assigned, and they cannot fail to be mischievous to the subtle life of the soul. No man becomes better by acts of mere freakishness and caprice. The mere denominational pervert is very often the devil's counterfeit of a genuine convert, and does not a little to bring Christ's name and work into reproach and contempt.

It is not difficult to find an explanation for the mischievous tendency of these frivolous and superficial changes to which the proselytiser tempts men.

A change that is not demanded by the instincts of a new life must be *attended with more or less of distraction, and distraction dissipates the vital forces of the spirit.* The fine energies required for growth are frittered away in acquiring some kind of adaptation to new conditions. Habits of spiritual assimilation are not easily formed in novel surroundings. A restlessness of temper is stimulated which prevents true edification. A slow process of acclimatisation has to be undergone, and the life is sometimes left incurably impoverished. And then the temptation arises for a man to expect too much from what is adventitious in the new relationship to which he has been introduced rather than to expect everything from those Divine forces that nurture the secret life of truth-seekers everywhere. And an empty outward without a correlated inward change, because of the false hope it excites, inevitably lays the foundation of much future scepticism. The step does not lead to all the man anticipated, and by and by he reaches a state of incurable indifference and stupefaction. The most hopeless sceptics are those who have dabbled with religion in all its possible forms and developments, and who have never given any one type of it a chance with them for many years together. Some time ago a wicked and wealthy Frenchman who died in India said, in his last will and testament, that "he had looked more or less into all religions, for his life had thrown him into contact with them, and he had found them all equally ridiculous. He had therefore decided to die in the faith in which he was born, that of the Roman Catholic Church." The zeal of proselytism tends to beget a sceptical temper of that sort. Men come to find that they gain nothing by superficial

changes of Church relation, and it becomes in the end terribly difficult to convince them there is any reality in religious life at all. Every successive experiment brings a new ally to the demon of scepticism that haunts the man's soul. The intriguer for party is recklessly profaning the most sacred endowments of the soul, and, himself a child of hell, communicates his spirit in aggravated form to his disciple. A change that is dictated by taste, fashion, caprice, and is not the constraint of intelligent conviction, must be evil.

Zeal for proselytism is manifestly *zeal for the aggrandisement of man* and of the schools and organisations with which his honour and interest have become identified. It is not often we are justified in pronouncing judgment upon the motives of individuals, but some systems stand self-condemned by their foundation-principles as specially conceived to build up human pride and power. When we set ourselves to win men to a school of thought, to an ecclesiastical organisation, to some outward form of religious discipline, and teach that salvation depends upon the recognition of agencies that are localised and directed from some governing centre upon earth, a child can see that man is exalted and the ever-present God abased by a propaganda of that sort. If we deny that manna from heaven falls throughout the entire camp of God's worshippers, and affirm that it can only be found in our tent and on our own table, or at least in the tents of one particular tribe, it scarcely needs average intelligence to see that we want to get men into our own pens and cages, to have them for our household slaves, rather than to feed them with the wonderful bread that brings

eternal life to men everywhere. When we limit the reception of grace by local or official rather than by broad moral conditions only; when we say grace must come through the channels of a particular Church organisation; when we proclaim that its fountain-head is in Rome, or Moscow, or Canterbury, or Berlin, it is obvious we are seeking to exalt some particular system and to glory in the name of some fallible man. We want a devotee for a human idol, a voter for some perishable corporation, an adherent for some vainglorious party, rather than a soul won from error and made partaker of eternal life through that knowledge which is diffusive as the sunshine. It is a very suspicious thing when we preach an evangel of partisanship, and tell a man he must come into our fold before he can be saved. That makes God's grace run in veins as rare as silver and admits the possibility of a monopolising proprietorship. It makes God a geographical God, and His Son a local Saviour. The spirit of modern proselytism practically declares that Christ is divided, and that the Pope of Rome or the Patriarch of the Greek Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the President of the Methodist Conference or the Chairman of the Congregational Union, was crucified for us.

Proselytism, however loud-sounding its professions of apostolicity, is hostile to true religion because *it destroys that spirit of love* which it is the chief aim of religion to implant and extend. Christ taught that the proclamation of the gospel would at the outset sow the world with discord and revolution, but then the end in view was of such unutterable significance, that these temporary disturbances of social life could

not for one moment be allowed to weigh against it. And moreover as the gospel came to be understood these discords awakened by its first proclamation died away. But the aims of proselytism are always petty, selfish, and momentary, and can never be looked upon as an offset to the resentments it provokes. And these resentments do not by any means tend to die away as the proselytising work succeeds. No community ever gains by the proselytes as distinguished of course from the converts of spontaneous conviction it wins. If there be a leaven of spirituality in that community, proselytes who deteriorate morally by the transfer of allegiance to which they have been allured will unite with the unregenerate majority in choking out that leaven. And the communities whose weak-kneed adherents have been cajoled away to competing communities will be estranged, and the loss of their good-will may be no light matter in the coming day of conflict. If the representatives of any religious organisation whatsoever act as a clan of ecclesiastical cattle-lifters for a generation or two, it is scarcely to be wondered at should the long-suffering people, whose borders they have invaded from time to time, join hands at last with their adversaries. Wherever men are bribed or wheedled or browbeaten or hoodwinked by unscriptural logic into leaving one community for another, and do not even pretend to make their transfer of relationship under the constraint of deep and serious conviction, animosities not easy to uproot will be sown. No communion is possible with the so-called Churches that practise this thing. The arch-schismatic, the ecclesiastical firebrand, the man hated of God who sows discord amongst brethren, is the unctuous proselytiser.

Proselytism involves *the appeal to impure and degrading motives.* The arts it is accustomed to employ debase and dishonour human nature till it becomes stripped of its best attributes and condemned to meanness and perpetual contempt. It does not seek to move men by informing them with spiritual knowledge, or reminding them of a knowledge they have forgotten and lost. It treats them as brute beasts to be drawn by baits, and brute beasts they often become. It makes them slaves by invoking authority, the authority of potentates of debatable character long since dead, the authority of a "fashion" Christ taught His disciples to despise, the authority of "the best society," not always distinguished by its practical enthusiasm for the Sermon on the Mount. It panders to self-interest amongst all classes, dropping significant hints about professional advancement, enlarged business connections, more superfine companionships, sacks of coal at Christmas. We are told sometimes that denominational rivalries are fruitful of good, for they stimulate activity and enlarge the area of Christian work. That may be so if we are true to the plan and spirit of Jesus Christ, and compete to see who can pour the largest amount of light into the popular mind, and bring the mightiest leverage of spiritual force to bear upon the human character. But if the rivalry is that which goes to prove who can degrade human nature most by competitive dole-giving and indiscriminate charity, who can purvey the cheapest and most fashionable form of religious service, who can make the way of life smoothest, broadest, most grateful to the feet, then we are only making our proselytes twofold more the children of hell than we write ourselves down by using these methods. Irreparable

injury is done to the religious life of a community by touting for its patronage. Hundreds of thousands of people in our midst assume that they have some favour to bestow on Christianity rather than that Christianity has infinite favours to bestow on them. The spread of this spirit makes Church discipline all but impossible. Proselytising zeal so utterly destroys the *morale* of some neighbourhoods that we can only describe them by bracketing them with the "rotten boroughs" of the good old parliamentary days.

See to it that you neither catch this proselytising mania yourselves, nor become captives to the sword and bow of those who live and act under its influence. It needs no abstruse logic to prove that a community which seeks to enter upon the work done by another community in winning men from barbarism to the Christian faith is not justly entitled to the Christian name; that to plant missions in populations where the Word that is able to make men wise unto salvation is publicly read and plainly expounded, is not a course Christ Himself would approve; and that the minister who spends his time in going to the doors of exemplary members of other Churches than his own, leaving at the same time hundreds of doomed souls in the clutch of the licensed victualler, is not acting in accordance with the teaching of that Master whose authority he so unscrupulously claims. It is painful to see in those around us at times the lack of unflinching fidelity to the traditions and principles of the godly Churches in which they have been born, nurtured, and prayed for with deep, sincere spiritual longing. Convictions may change, and a man may feel bound to readjust his Church relationships. Not a word must be said against readjustments that are strictly con-

scientious in their character. Sometimes a man may find his peculiarities of temperament and religious life better met by one type of Church organisation than another. Well, hearty though we may be in our attachment to the Church of our birth, let us never be bigots, for salvation is to be found in any of the communities around us in which the Scriptures are read and enforced. But it is to be feared many of the changes that take place arise from pique, caprice, ambition, spiritual lawlessness. Do these denominational perverts improve by the change, or do they not rather justify the strong speech of Christ? How many of them become more prayerful, more constant in their study of God's Word, more simple and unworldly, more generous in their self-renunciations? The lack of affection and gratitude shown by giddy young people to the Church that has lifted their forefathers out of the coarsest moral and social conditions, and made them by its holy and helpful influences the heads of respected families, is unspeakably humiliating and sad. In some cases it is the avowed purpose of this truancy to get away from conviction, restraint, Church discipline.

Any religious community has the right to bring its saving energies to bear upon the man who is living in sin, and the community that saves him will be providentially designated by its very success to the work of building up his spiritual life, and employing his service. And unless some other community has shown itself better able, through the power of the Spirit in its midst, to renew and hallow his children, the father's obligation will descend to the children. Do not let us suppose that we have no debt to repay to the Churches whose teachings saved and ennobled

our fathers, whatever they may have done for us, whilst those Churches at least remain faithful to their first principles. Was God amusing Himself by bubble-blowing when He called into being the Churches of the Reformation, the Churches which embodied what was noblest in the Puritanism of England, the Churches that were the outgrowth of the saintliness and heroism of the Covenanters in Scotland? Can we imagine that the Churches which sprang out of the evangelical revival of the last century were meant to be the trifles and playthings of a moment only? If we have no respect for the work and history and teaching of the Churches in which we have been cradled, do let us at least have a little self-respect, and refuse to fulfil the part of petty, dumb, easily-handled counters with which the proselytiser plays his game. Beware of the woe resting upon both parties in this species of transaction denounced by Jesus Christ. Accept teaching from no one who does not come to you commended by a deeper knowledge of the philosophy of salvation and a richer experience of its power than those amongst whom God in His providence has cast your lot. Christ would just as soon have the foul spirit on His side which cried out in the synagogue, "I know Thee who Thou art, the holy one of God," as the lisping ecclesiastic or his district visitor who goes about, not professing to have a conscious salvation to teach to others, but the mere agents of an organised system of proselytism. "What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or to take My name into thy lips?" Christ wishes to suppress the proselytiser, the man who touts for adherents and manufactures partisans, but He wishes to create the evangelist by thousands

and by tens of thousands. "I believed, therefore have I spoken." That is the man Christ wants, the man who has an experience, and who can bear a testimony. "Ye are the light of the world." You must evangelise by the communication of knowledge, and especially by the communication of that knowledge which springs up out of your own spiritual life, and will create life in others. True life will organise itself. You might as well give lectures to a seed on the art of growing, as dictate to men the Church organisations they must accept under the most terrible penalties if they refuse. The true Church is that in which there is the spontaneous drawing together of life according to its own laws, and where Christ is looked upon as King alone. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

XVIII.

THE MANIFOLD METHODS OF THE SPIRIT.

"And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."—1 Cor. xii. 6.

The apostle has just been speaking of the various gifts and ministries in the primitive Church. To a modern mind some of those gifts and ministries would have appeared eccentric, if not, indeed, repulsive and grotesque. Its first impulse would be to say the range of type is too promiscuous, and must be limited at any cost. But to have limited the range of type would have been to shut out from the circle of spiritual benefit and edification, not a few people of that age whom it was God's purpose to touch and to save, and who perhaps could not be savingly touched in other ways. Diverse ministries necessarily fulfilled their appointed ends by manifold methods of working.

There is an undue tendency amongst us to look for uniformity of spiritual process and manifestation. Sometimes it is a narrow, one-sided interpretation of a fragment of the inspired narrative that leads into the error. Men select, for instance, the wonderful picture of Elijah at Horeb, and make the chosen symbol of God's revelation at that particular crisis

one from which there is to be no after-departure for all time. They tell us that the Lord is not in the earthquake, and the Lord is not in the fire, and the Lord is not in the whirlwind, but the Lord *is* in the still small voice. They seem to forget that there were special reasons why God spoke in this particular way to His overwrought servant who had been trusting too much in the dramatic forces of reform. The fact is overlooked that when God was revealed to Moses He did appear once and again in the fire; when He spake to Job He did make the whirlwind vocal with His message; and it was when the foundations of the world were discovered by a convulsion of nature, and the storm rocked the forest like reeds, that God came down for the salvation of the Psalmist. God's message is not ever and only a whispered monotone. He speaks to different men in different ways, and has a repertory of processes that not all the symbolisms of the physical universe can set forth.

The same mistaken tendency often affects our interpretation of religious life and experience. There are those who cannot bring themselves to believe that conversion in a moment is possible, whilst others regard with a suspicion and scepticism suited to panic periods of counterfeit coin, a conversion the quiet stages of which have stretched through years. Fashions in conversion are apt to grow up, no less than in bonnets and gowns. In sections of the population peculiarly susceptible to religious emotion and enthusiasm, or amongst those who cherish with passionate fondness the tradition of the great evangelical revival of the last century, a demand directly or indirectly asserts itself that conversion shall be

instantaneous, dramatic, overwhelming ; an upheaval, a thunder-clap. The mere accidents of conversion are regarded as of almost equal importance with the essential life in which the supreme change issues. A quiet and insensible renewal of the character is nothing thought of. A change of heart that cannot be localised and timed as precisely as the tides and the sunrise will scarcely suffice to rank the man who is the subject of it with the true saints. And then with another set of men the conversion that is not preceded by a long term of practical reform, and the germ-cell of which is not sacramental, calls forth more or less of depreciation. Speakers in Diocesan Councils sometimes set themselves to denounce what they are pleased to call "the Methodist theory of conversion," and declare that the quick moral changes professed and bepraised from time to time are the happy products of a purely human fanaticism. In their view of things God is too much a person of propriety to work outside the elaborate organisation of their own special body. Conversion must conform to all the conditions laid down in their ecclesiastical fashion-sheets. In fact, God always operates through the sacraments, and the fitness of the celebrant and the tractability of the material which is to be subjected to the sacramental miracle are very subordinate questions indeed. The baptismal font or the communion table is set off against the inquiry room, the exciting revival prayer-meeting against the quiet transformations of a well-taught and kindly disciplined home.

And then we are sometimes apt to fix a rigid type to which the form of that assurance, which is the common privilege of believers, must correspond.

One man says he seems to have heard the sin-forgiving God speak to him in distinct syllables. Another is not content with the rest which God has gently poured into his heart, like the soft zephyr stealing on noiseless wing through open casement and known only by the scent of summer fields it brings ; he also must have a distinct voice from heaven. He perhaps scarcely realises that the first man's mental idiosyncrasy is such that he has unwittingly dramatised God's whisper of peace to his conscience. One person declares that all who profess to hear the very voice of God absolving them are madmen or fanatics. Another is distressed because his sense of assurance does not assume the same particular phase and colour as that of the more emotional believer by his side. No room is left in our petty schemes for variations in the type of Divine work. It is too often assumed that the experience of a hundred believers must be just as much alike as the hexagonal cells in the honeycomb. Our short-sighted theories of uniformity exclude divergence or contrast of pattern.

The fact again is not infrequently ignored that one man's spiritual history may differ as much from another's as the process of his conversion. It is taken for granted that all genuine religious experience, not only in its outward incidents, but even in the language by which it is most appropriately expressed, must fit itself to one imperious standard. If a man is modest, unassuming, and unduly timid, when he comes to find that the inward signs he is watching do not dovetail into all that goes on in his neighbour's soul, he will begin to think there must be something amiss with his own spiritual state ; or if

he is of a bold and self-assertive temperament, he will begin to insinuate that which his neighbour possesses is not quite the genuine thing. Sometimes a man distresses himself because the form assumed by God's inward working at one stage of his religious history differs so much from the form it assumes at a later stage. Can he be God's child if there be such a chasm between the psychological experiences of the past and what is going on within him to-day? Is God's great perfecting process still continued within him? He forgets those natural changes of temperament involving no real moral issues which take place in the successive stages of his life, and influence not a little the moods of the nature in which the Divine Spirit still operates.

And then in connection with the present-day teaching upon the subject of holiness it is half assumed by men who represent opposite sides of the controversy that the method by which God sanctifies is necessarily uniform. One says he is made holy by an act of faith, and if the work be of God, ever eager to accomplish His will within us, the time-factor must not come into our reckoning. Another says he distrusts the worth of sanctification by a power sudden in its forth-puttings as the flashes of the electric search-light. God's children must grow little by little into perfect practical conformity to the Divine pattern, daily testing themselves in many spheres of Christian duty and service; and, like not a few saintly men and women of whom he has heard and read, he is passing by a slow and noiseless twilight into the sinless day. He has no faith at all in complete and instantaneous sanctification, and the people who profess it are either ignorant

or insincere. One asserts the genuineness of the rapid method to the exclusion of all others, and the other asserts the genuineness of the quiet, unostentatious growth, the secret of which is never confessed to another, and bans all experiences that do not conform to these definitions. No attempt is made to test God's work by the inward qualities it will possess in both cases if it be indisputably His. It is judged by its outward and more or less casual incidents, and the judgment is crude, superficial, capricious from beginning to end.

In dealing with these questions of the religious life we need to copy the breadth, far-sightedness, and kindly catholicity of the Apostle Paul. The tests by which he judged religious life were moral, and as such absolute, uniform, inflexible. On all questions of fundamental ethic he was stern, passionate, unbending. He is ready to hurl his anathemas at an angel who should venture to preach a gospel with innovations in it. No man must continue in Church fellowship who tampers with the primary ethics of marriage. And yet when he comes to interpret the facts of religious life and experience, how kind, tender, and broad-minded this ironside teacher and moralist becomes! He could never run the risk of disparaging work which answered his great Master's test, and proved by its fruit that it was of God. The incidents of that mighty change which came to himself on the way to Damascus could be no precedent for the shape God's saving work might take in the heart and life of another. He did not assume that God must work in every man through the particular method chosen in his own conversion. He insisted that there might be an endless diversity of working, and under this

endless diversity of working he boldly confesses that it is God who worketh all in all. "He divideth to every man severally as He will," and not only so, but uses every man's gift in the way that to His sovereign wisdom seems best.

I. The Divine mind itself *takes delight in variety*, loving it not improbably for its own sake.

The earth is in no sense like a desk full of drawers and pigeon-holes of the same geometrical arrangement. It resembles rather a mansion no two rooms of which are alike, and where every separate panel in the maze of rooms is filled with some superb and distinctive design. An ever-varying pattern of flowers runs through the different zones of the earth as well as through the different seasons of the year. Forms of life interminably distinguished from each other crowd earth and air and sea. One wonders how this wealth of modification can arise in structures built upon the same broad plan and dominated by the same ruling ideas. Besides the salient dividing lines that separate great natural orders and species and families from each other there are exhaustless variations which distinguish individuals of the same family. Under skilled and watchful culture the forms and colours of flowers admit of almost unlimited variation. Every germ of life is susceptible of the most interesting changes in its development. Different agencies are employed in the fertilisation of flowers. The little capsules on the fronds of different families of ferns are made to set free the spores with which they are packed by ingenious contrivances, any one of which would deserve a patent if it had been devised by man. The chemistries and mechanisms

of the organic world are exhaustless in their range. There are no strict duplicates in nature. Her prodigality of both form and process is marvellous. It might be the master passion of the Unseen Creator to crowd His worlds to overflow with contrasted types of life, and to illustrate in His cunning handiwork the widest variety of method.

The great scientific naturalist of our century makes this tendency to universal variation the basis of that conception of evolution which bears his name. The countless orders of life have been built up out of minute modifications which tend to appear in each individual organism. Mr. Darwin says that no two human feet are anatomically alike. Slight differences are sure to appear in the weight or size of bone, tendon, or muscle, or in the relation in which the parts are placed to each other. Without committing ourselves to an opinion upon the doctrine of "The Origin of Species," is there not another standpoint from which we may look at this universal tendency to variation with all that it suggests? Does it not seem to hint that God may delight in variety for its own sake?

And shall there be no wise and beautiful variations in the ways and means by which He brings forth the higher life of the Spirit? Do not suppose we must all be made free from sin by the same secondary agencies calling forth in the course of their operation the same attendant incident and detail. Do not look for exact duplicates in conversion. Do not imagine we must all be brought to supreme spiritual fruitfulness by the same psychological pathway. God uses different ministries which, though meeting at last in the same final result, act for the time being in

different planes of thought and feeling. Do not begin to doubt your own religious life or to depreciate another's because you fail to recognise wholesale uniformity and correspondence in what lies upon the mere fringe of religion. In this higher world it may be God sets Himself to create freshness, contrast, far-stretching scales and ranges of spiritual type, and delights in a gracious and exquisite diversity for its own sake.

II. Through this diversity of process *God magnifies His own sovereign and manifold wisdom.*

The worm knows the world upon which it crawls by one sense only, and a world that appeals through but one sense to a little bit of wriggling sensibility must be a very paltry and insignificant object indeed, at least judged from our more complex standpoint. If God were to narrow the range of His operation and reveal Himself in one form of spiritual activity only, we should not have very lofty and adequate views of His marvellous wisdom, strength, resource. Shutting Himself up to one formula where diversity was possible, God would shrink to the dimensions of a creature in our esteem, the puny slave of His own unalterable method. It is a part of the eternal purpose that there should "be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God," and that purpose could not be fulfilled if He were to deal with us all and work in our separate natures by a cast-iron formula incapable of fresh adjustment for any age, race, or individual.

The old heathen world limited God to one form of manifestation only, and that was the basis of idolatry as far at least as it was an error of the intellect. Men brought themselves to think of light or fire or

wind as His favourite symbol or His most significant mode of manifestation, and by and by they wanted another Spirit to inhabit the streams, and another to preside over the mountains, and yet another to energise the reproductive processes of nature, and in this way God was robbed of His rightful honour as the Sovereign of all these objects and the processes with which they were identified. In the gracious economies established in the Church God seems to be reversing the temptation to that fateful error. He associates Himself with all the varying influences and movements of the new spiritual creation whenever they tend at least to bring the soul back to God. If we identify Him with one process only, we are following in the steps of the first apostates from God, and quenching the very glory of His diversely asserted sovereignty.

In all the higher grades of intelligence methods of action are elastic and adjustable. Animal instinct is fixed. It only acts in straight lines, and cannot bend itself to new conditions. The bee has been seen to hover about the glass of a window for half an hour and vex itself with fruitless attempts to escape, whilst the sash was wide open a few inches above it. A pike bruised itself for three months against the glass of an aquarium before it made the discovery that the glass was a resisting medium. A beaver will cut logs of wood when no water is near as though it were still preparing to construct its dam. The dog will turn three or four times round before lying down to sleep at night—a useless habit that has come down to it from its ancestor of ten thousand years back, which needed to prepare its bed by trampling down the grass of the forest or jungle. Instinct can never get

out of these fixed grooves. For an unreasoning brute there is no escape from the track and the mill-round servitude of these monotonous acts and habits. The man who can only do his work by rule of thumb has a bankrupt wit. Whilst the weakling works by only one method, the expert with ideas can vary his modes of work to his tastes and circumstances. We all admire resource, versatility of method, many-sidedness.

And God magnifies His sovereign wisdom by doing His work in countless ways. It is only when we bring into our survey a very wide field of religious life, experience, and history, and fit far-ranging facts into a universal whole, that we can realise in any degree the manifold wisdom of God.

One of the revolutionary societies of Russia published a news-sheet from time to time that was a great puzzle to the Government. No trace could be found of the printing office. The fact was the members of the society carried about the printing office in their pockets. Each man had a share of the type with him, and when it was desired to print they all came together and contributed their several portions. And it is in some such way as that we must put together and spell out the record of God's manifold wisdom. It is not epitomised in the history of one man or gathered together into the processes of one conversion, but distributed rather through every race and age and Church.

III. God's diverse workings seem to *individualise His love and saving compassions.*

Oriental despotisms are accustomed to treat men in the mass. The village, the clan, or the family is the unit of which the law takes account. If it has to

reckon with the individual offender it reckons with him through these social aggregations of which he is a part. The victim of a wrong can only secure redress through some tribal or municipal corporation with which he is identified. One would not care to be placed under an economy of that sort, even if all our rights were sufficiently secured. It seems to treat the mere personality of a man with supreme contempt. The kingdom of heaven is a complete contrast to these Oriental despotisms. Its economies would have no attraction for us apart from the sympathetic recognition of the individual by the Shepherd King, who calls His own by their names, and never forgets the personal equation in their lives.

In some of the factories of the Midlands we may see hooks and eyes all exactly alike stamped into shape by automatic machinery which is fed with iron wire and jerks these finished articles out wholesale. In the iron mills of the North, streaming with furnace-flames and trembling with the clanging thunder of the forge, we may see steam saws and shears cutting hundreds of miles of steel rails to the same precise length, and acres of plating for iron ships all to the same precise pattern. If God dealt with us in our renewal, discipline, perfecting by some such uniform, unvarying, ruthlessly mechanical process as that, we should not be altogether satisfied. There is that within us which cries out for more specific and individual treatment, and which will not consent to be passed by. Wholesale and undeviating uniformity seems to spurn our personal solicitations and shut out all idea of sympathy.

God fills all time and space with His immensity, and yet in His wonderful nature there is place and

opportunity for discriminating affections, personal adjustments, infinitely varied ministries of grace and power. No less vast than the God of the Pantheist, He is yet the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and your God and mine. If God gives me a face and voice and form and gait that distinguish me from all others, it is not unlikely that He will give me a conversion and discipline and religious history that will make the marks of my spiritual identity in the Church of believers.

Workhouse children look so much alike, it is said, not because they are all dressed in the same uniform only, but because they have been dealt with under a scheme of general regulations from their infancy upwards. How can you expect the development of strong individual features in poor little mortals who have been taught, washed, fed, birched, and put to bed in the gross? Certain establishments form a part of our national estate, the inmates of which are known only by a number. A kingdom whose subjects were placed under economies of undeviating sameness, and distinguished from each other by a number engulfing all traces of individual identity, would scarcely be entitled to call itself a kingdom of blessedness, emancipation, and redeeming grace. We are brought out of prison that we may be called by our names, enjoy the many-sided influences of home and grow into individuality. We are after all children of princely birth, and the ministry exercised towards us will be that of fine, discriminating, specific, all-nurturing love. In His mystic economies of grace and help God recognises the personal bent and promise and possibility in us. If God's work could be reduced to one ever-repeated pattern, you would

rob it of the glory of its gentle and sympathetic discrimination.

Do not be troubled because your past and present experiences in spiritual things are not of a piece with those of your godly friends. It is by the varied process of work that God makes the communication of His saving love individual, distinctive, specific. The very fact over which you stumble as though God were denying you some grace given to another is a token that His sympathy is manifold, and that you are more to the Great Giver of the Spirit than a vague, featureless atom in the aggregate Church life.

The set of Dresden, or Worcester, or Satsuma which is most valued is that in which every piece bears a separate design, though common touches of colour unite them into one. The separate designs represent so much more of the artist's thought and time and love. Let your separately ordered conversion and your separately toned experience never tempt you to despise the Divine gift within you. Let them rather speak the more loudly of the painstaking thought and love of Him who works within you for salvation.

IV. God's manifold methods of working are anticipated by the *wide diversities of natural temperament and disposition* He finds within us.

In dealing with different substances the workman has to use different tools and to bring about his results in some cases by opposite methods. He cannot treat cedar, ebony, granite, marble, gold, silver, ivory, steel in the same way. Different kinds of metals must be subjected to very different temperatures. Individual plants from the same stock, according to the testimony of the scientific gardener,

will establish their own little peculiarities of habit and will need careful observation and a separate and delicately regulated treatment if they are to be brought to their highest possible excellence. The doctor finds that every constitution does not respond with the same readiness to the same drugs, and prescribes most successfully when he has become familiar with the individual idiosyncrasy. The skilful diamond-cutter does not cut and polish every stone by the blind application of some pre-existing rule. Before a single thing is done to the stone a very careful study is made of its peculiarities, and the plan of cutting and polishing is determined after a long consultation upon the question how its special features of promise can best be brought out. It is said that the Koh-i-noor was spoilt because it was cut in deference to the wishes of a high and justly respected personage at Court, and its individual qualities were not sufficiently taken into account.

And the material God takes in hand must be approached at different angles and submitted to the special processes that best agree with its promise. One man can be most successfully dealt with through his reason, another through his affections, a third through his keen clear sense of right and wrong, a fourth through his instinctive sensibility to the supernatural. One man can be most effectually impressed through a crowd and in an atmosphere of excitement, and another will find himself most profoundly moved when he is in complete solitude. One type of disposition will respond most quickly to one aspect of the Divine character, and another to a contrasted aspect. Conversion cannot be expected to conform in its successive stages to an unvarying pattern.

And the after processes of spiritual growth and training vary just as much as the conversion. God does not wish to obliterate the original grain in the material that comes under His transforming touch. Conversion with the discipline to which it is introductory would be a one-sided gain if it destroyed all individuality. No mother would care to put her children into the hands of some enchantress who would make them all alike, even if the type were that of Apollo or Venus. At the risk of a little plainness she would rather have touches of dissimilarity and contrast in the build, features, and carriage of her children. God must make His processes sufficiently wide and various to allow the preservation of individual characteristics. Grace refines the identity of the original temperament, but does not melt it down as the burglar melts stolen silver so that the police can no longer trace it. If the multiplex types of natural character that arise are to be preserved in a state of sanctification to God, the Spirit must work by incalculably varied processes. The rule of thumb sometimes comes into operation in religion and impairs the specific promise in men who might have been chief jewels in the diadem that is in the right hand of the Most High.

We have not half enough individuality in the Church, and we should have more of it if we were only true to the work of the Spirit.

The sections of Church life with which we may happen to be identified would be vastly more interesting and attractive to us if the germs of variation implanted in all believers by the Spirit of God received a sufficiently wise and kindly nurture. We sin against the diversely working Spirit and

bring a morbid and unwholesome sameness into the Church when we frown on multiformity of religious life.

A brilliant American writer has said, "Relations are apt to hate each other because they are too much alike. It is so frightful to be in an atmosphere of family idiosyncrasies, to see all the hereditary uncomeliness or infirmity of body, all the defects of speech, all the failings of temper intensified by concentration so that every fault of our own finds itself multiplied by reflections, like our images in a saloon lined with mirrors. Nature knows what she is about. The centrifugal principle which grows out of the opposition of like to like is only the repetition in character of the arrangement we see expressed materially in certain seed capsules which burst and throw the seed to all points of the compass. A house is a large pod with a human germ or two in each of its cells and chambers; it opens by dehiscence of the front door by and by and projects one of its germs to Kansas, another to Chicago, another to San Francisco, and so on; and this that Smith may not be Smithed to death, and Brown may not be Browned into a madhouse, but mix with the world again and struggle back to average humanity."

And the tendency to sameness of religious life and experience is just as depressing as the repetition of idiosyncrasies in the family circle. Meetings for religious fellowship are often deadened and killed outright by platitude and monotony. Those taking part in them become mere echoes of each other, and accentuate with nauseous reiteration what is extraneous only. And so the centrifugal force in religion comes into play, and men try to escape monotony

by rushing to extremes. The man trained in the excitements of revivalism craves for the restfulness of soft cathedral music and worship, and the precise Churchman, maddened by frigid and genteel routine, swings off to the Salvation Army. Now it is possible for us without bringing jar and discord into the Church to cultivate a Divine diversity. It ought to be easy for us to do that, for the diversely operating Spirit plants the seed of a refreshing and instructive variation within us. We need to find a common meeting-ground for Scotch thoughtfulness and Cornish fire, and the ideal Church fellowship true to God's pattern would be that in which the godly philosopher and the shouting enthusiast would be found side by side.

V. God varies His processes of working from time to time to remind us that *the end of His working is incomparably more important than the mere process.*

It is only too possible for us to fall into the vicious habit of prizing the form and forgetting the substance of the Spirit's working. Never let us idolise the process whilst we forget the unseen Worker and the paramount ends He sets Himself to compass. It matters very little how He works. The great question for us is, Does He work at all, and are we becoming through His mystic activity worthy of His skill? Do we bid fair to touch that glorious goal of destiny for which His hand is training us? We may be led to that goal by a hundred different pathways. The one subject that should interest us to the exclusion of all side issues is, Does the great end of our calling come appreciably nearer to us? Conversion must be tested by its fruits.

The man who is the possessor of a handful of

sovereigns does not need to trouble himself how the gold was worked of which the sovereigns are made. It may have been picked up in solid nuggets amongst the quartz rocks, or mined and separated by a chemical process from other metals with which it was combined, or washed grain by grain from the sand of a mountain stream. All the owner of the coins cares to know is that the metal has been accepted at the mint as pure, and the stamp of the realm has been put upon it to give it universal currency. Whilst the empire lasts the little discs of gold will represent food and clothes and a thousand nameless luxuries and refinements.

And it is a subject of comparatively trifling concern to us what methods God has been using to remove the evil from our natures and refine and consummate the good. The great question is, Are we showing ourselves pure gold under the process? Is every trace of dross and earthliness and gross animal temper passing away from the substance of our life? Do we bear God's image in our souls? Have we the sense of Divine acceptance, and does that part of our characters which is turned towards the world bear proof that we are those whom God has approved?

Not a little evil is done by the narrow spirit we sometimes show in our efforts to discriminate religious life. We should ever judge it by the intrinsic qualities that belong to it, and not by the extrinsic phenomena that may accompany it. If we assume that God is accustomed to work within the human soul by one defined process only, we shall discourage not a few of those around us in whom there is a genuine beginning of religious life. Hosts of distracted souls have been driven away from the religious communities in which

they were cradled and in which they would probably have thriven best, and in some cases have drifted into communions where they have learnt perilous religious errors, because they were made to feel that their conversions did not quite conform to the one type in traditional favour there. In the method by which they were recovered to God there had been nothing startling, their religious life and experience ran in smooth and uneventful channels, and they were met with more or less of coldness and suspicion. They had not sinned tragically, and they were not saved tragically, and the great change could not be honestly told in capital letters interspersed with frequent notes of exclamation. And on the other hand, those who extol reserve, rational frigidity, and moderation, are not always so hospitable as they might be to zeal, passion, vivid religious life, and experience. If the leaders of the English Church of the eighteenth century had recognised that it was God and no other who was working by startling methods in connection with the preaching of Wesley, Whitefield, and their helpers in the gospel, the religious communities springing up out of that notable revival would never have needed a separate Church existence and organisation.

When the non-essential incidents of conversion and religious experience are put in place of the essential principles, many people are led thereby to spend, in barren dissatisfactions over the form of their conversion, time and thought and strength which ought to be given entirely to the cultivation of the religious life they already possess. Lend any sanction to this idea that God only works by one method and manifests Himself to each separate soul in the same

particular way, and you will tempt men and women into religious constraint, artificiality, and affectation, and lay in their hearts the foundations of a profound and painful scepticism. They will be unduly eager to have their conversion and experience conformed to the favoured type, and will by and by begin to suspect they have had too large a hand in their own salvation and doubt the supernatural reality of the work accomplished in their souls. When every conversion adjusts itself to the Episcopalian, or Presbyterian, or Plymouth, or early or late Methodist type and precedent, and it is taken for granted that there is no sterling conversion other than in these particular ways, we are apt to feel very much as when we look at a bit of Dutch landscape gardening or peep over a wall and see a box-hedge that has grown itself into peacocks and church spires and Norman castles. Nature, it is true, has been at work, but we are more impressed by the fact that man has been at work likewise, and has taken the reins out of Nature's hands. If we assume that God must always convert and train and sanctify men after one particular pattern we shall be in imminent danger of despising not a little of God's best work because it does not adjust itself to our chosen standard. With swinish ignorance and infatuation we may chance in some cases to trample on the pearl of great price itself because it is not presented in a setting of superficial incident presumably indispensable if our idea of conversion is to be satisfied.

But although methods may vary, wherever God works the result is one and the same. For ourselves and for others the supreme test must ever be practical. At the same time we must not be cast down because

the effects appearing in the character do not seem at present proportionate to the energies that are brooding within us. "To will," and that however faintly, is the token of the Divine working within us no less than "to do."

A present-day romance closes with a description of an African hunter's adventure in an underground cave. A stone door of great weight closed the entrance to the cave, and the door had been treacherously closed upon himself and a companion by the sorceress of a negro tribe. For hours that seemed interminable the two groped on in utter darkness. At last they agreed that escape was impossible, and grew faint with despair. At that moment, however, the huntsman thought he perceived the slightest touch of wind upon his hand, and began to argue that if the air were stirring however faintly there must be access at some point or other to the outside world. For many weary hours he and his companion followed the drift of the current, and at last a rill of water was reached that flowed out through the rocks. By following its course they finally succeeded in breaking out into the daylight at the point where the stream gushed forth from the mountain side.

Do you seem to yourself shut up in unbelief and despair? Are the heavens as brass? Does some decree of Fate seem to put religious conviction far away from you? Have you struggled again and again after the clear and happy experiences of which others speak, and do they seem quite impossible to you? Surely all is not stagnation and stony despair? Is there no current of right desire in your nature, however faint? The least set of the affections

towards what is pure and holy is the sign that God has not cast you off, but still works within you. Wherever that Spirit breathes whose symbol is the wind, there is the promise of the great breaking forth into light and freedom. Let us yield our wills to God, and suffer Him to work in His own way. Do not insist upon the vivid, the dramatic, the overwhelming. We are too much like Herod, and want God to work, not so much because we prize the ends to which His work leads, but because we covet the strange. We are entitled, we think, to claim something out of the common. If that be your spirit He will meet you with silence. If you recognise God's sovereignty and keep yourself from the fatuous temerity of dictating processes you shall never be passed by.

> "So I may Thy Spirit know,
> Let Him as He listeth blow;
> Let the manner be unknown
> So I may with Thee be one."

XIX.

THE AUGUST CO-PARTNERSHIP.

"Labourers together with God."—1 Cor. iii. 9.

These words are used to emphasise the truth that in the process of teaching and saving men God's work links itself with man's, and God's work is so much mightier and more wonderful than man's, that it is idle to weigh the worth and work of one human labourer against another's, after the fashion of these Corinthian sectaries. We might just as well pick out tiny shells in the cement binding the stones of a minster and divide ourselves into factions to champion the architectural honour due to the several tenants of each particular primeval shell, or select striking portions of oak carving and divide ourselves into factions to champion the artistic possibilities of the several acorns that evolved such magnificent material. A rational being has not time to think of these infinitesimal questions. He wishes to save up his tribute of honour for the genius who planned arch and spire, and dreamt out flowered screen and stall, and guided the whole to its many-sided perfection. God's true labourers will be rewarded not by the reckless praise and short-sighted judgments of men, but by Him who

counts them allies, and in the strength of whose gift all right work must be done.

This thought of coadjutorship with God is carried out under *two instructive metaphors—husbandry and temple-building*. Seed and soil may be chosen with perfect skill, but before the least sign of growth can come, the planting of the earlier and the watering of the later labourer must be conjoined to the vivifying power of God. The temple-courses may be laid in gold and silver and precious stones, but it is God who at the outset must lay the one foundation in the gift of Christ, and who in the end must turn the fabric into a temple by the sanctities of His own descending presence. Whatever the material of the temple it is God who gives it its essential honour, and who destroys the worker of evil who defiles the temple. Man's handicraft, however ethereal its cunning, can never make the temple. "We are labourers together with God."

These words, spoken primarily of the labours of the first missionaries of the truth in Corinth, apply to all the ministries of all God's people. The chief evil of priestism is its narrowness. It predicates supernatural co-operation of special functions only exercised by selected officers in the Church. The apostle asserted this high co-partnership of activity concerning no sacramental prerogative committed to either himself or Apollos. In three instances only in Corinth had Paul administered the initiatory rite of the Christian faith. The work of Apollos was pre-eminently that of a teacher and controversialist. The Divine energy co-ordinated itself with that teaching and testimony in which every member of the Church might engage according to his knowledge, and not

with official privilege or ecclesiastical rank. This dignity attaches itself inalienably to every true worker in the kingdom of Jesus who may say with the same emphasis and authority as the apostles, "We are labourers together with God."

Man's communion with his Maker is not only a fellowship of worship, but a fellowship of service. We often assume that it is a more blessed distinction to stand with veiled face before the glory on high than to bear the burden and heat of the day in the vineyard below. That may be our childish error of perception. To pass from unselfish work to beatific and unending Psalmody only might be an anti-climax.

Man's association with the high enterprise of his Maker seems to be anticipated in *the image originally imprinted upon him, in the graduated processes that led up to human redemption, and in the signs of God's active moral energy in the hearts of men.*

The nature imprinted upon man at the beginning seems to designate him for this high place in after-history.

There is a sense in which the Creator brings the lowliest things at the feet of man into co-operation with Himself. To have illustrated this in many ways will perhaps be the net result credited a century hence to the research and teaching of Darwin and his school. The naturalist has shown that the lowliest types of life may so act as to modify both their own structure and surroundings. The unseen initiative of a Creator is not superseded, but the meanest creature has a significant part in uplifting the imposing orders and economies of life for which it is a starting-point. The problems of geology would have

assumed another shape, and the political history epitomised in the white cliffs of Dover never have seen the sun, but for the minute crustaceans from the wreck of whose life our chalk-hills have been built. The geography of the tropical archipelagoes would have borne a different contour and complexion, but for the reef-building industries of untold generations of coral insects. The belts of vegetation upon the surface of the earth would have been less beautiful and variegated than the Divine plan contemplated, but for the work of birds in transporting seeds and fruits from zone to zone, before the first raft or dug-out had been paddled through the waves. Frail forms of life have controlled the destinies of continents. The wing of bird, the claw of quadruped, the antennæ of insect, the hand and foot and face of man, have all been modified by the acts of ancestors, and have in their turn modified land and sea and sky.

All these things, however, have been unconscious of the ends they were fulfilling. If one of these tiny organisms had possessed intelligence to comprehend the statement, and if it could have been told of the colossal interests it was helping to mould and direct, such a conception would have been beyond the bounds of its belief. The creatures beneath us are unwitting abettors of the great Creator's plans. It is man's distinction to be an intelligent co-worker, and to understand according to the measure of his capacity the sublime plans he is helping to promote. "Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth ; but I have called you friends."

There was the latent promise of *enlightened co-opera-*

tion with all the work of God when man was made in God's image. The mechanic never makes one piece of machinery after the pattern of another unless he intends it to do the same kind of work. The face of the clock is made after the pattern of the sundial, and the face of the watch after the pattern of the clock, because it is meant to answer the same end—that is, to register time. The mechanic never thinks of putting a clock-face inscribed with the twelve hours on a barometer, a mariner's compass, or a steam-gauge, because these instruments are intended to do different types of work. The dummy or lay figure has no place in God's economy. God is an essential activity, and He can only be represented by an activity. That which is mute, impassive, statuesque, can never be His image and likeness. Labour is part of man's education for that co-partnership with God to which he has been designated by these birth-marks.

Man's fellowship with his Maker is first natural and then spiritual. In his development he follows the footsteps of his Eternal Archetype. As God rested from the processes of physical creation, yet continued to work through His Son by a finer touch and a more lavish love and in a sublimer realm, so with the moral history of man. His natural must be superseded by high spiritual activity. The garden was the nursery of the race. By its simple husbandries man disciplined his dawning senses and bound himself into alliance with his Maker in the nurture of fruit and bloom. And then at length we see him exercising himself in the high spiritual husbandries of the wilderness, a co-worker in the noblest things of grace with that reconciled God from whose favour he had fallen. It was in anticipation of his dignity

as a fellow-labourer that he was made in God's image.

This conjoint work and service is indicated in *the graduated character of the processes that led on to the accomplishment of our redemption.*

It is quite conceivable that the gospel might have always been what it was on the evening of the Fall, a promise in the lips of the Most High not to be syllabled by other lips. Or it might have remained what it was on the night of the Advent, music for the lip and lyre of the angelic hosts. It might have taken the form desired by scribes and Sadducees, "a sign from heaven," and have shone over men for ever, without coming down to rest upon their heads. The Messiah might have been sent without the education of a special race to receive Him. He might have reserved to Himself the interpretation of His redeeming death. Or He might have left the secret of His death to be deciphered by some gifted thinker of the after-times. The redemptive mystery of God might have been timed to yield up its secret treasures suddenly in the after-education of the race. God might have hidden it away for far-off discovery, as He stored the primeval gravels with rubies and the primeval reefs with gold. The sealed secret might have been put into some hidden fold of the brain and left to work itself into view with the coming ages. But God's method was far otherwise. The coming evangel must be reflected in all the stages of its conception from countless minds. Men must enter into it, long for it, dream of it, pray for it again and again. Its promise must be secretly echoed from the deepest places of the soul. The Divine and human elements are co-ordinated. Christ Himself will not

fully declare the spiritual secret of His own Cross. He must not anticipate His apostles in unfolding the doctrine of redemption. Perhaps in no other sphere is man's absolute hopelessness and helplessness so pathetically apparent as here. None can redeem his brother. And yet it is reserved to St. Paul to formulate the theology of the Cross. The Spirit who works in the Son the brightness of the Father's glory as well as the mirror of the coming humanity, works in the Church of the Son, in its earliest and latest ministers and adherents, and admits them to the fellowship of this sacrificial achievement.

Is not this Divine co-operation with us in the work and service of the gospel sufficiently *attested by not a few things we may see in the world around us?* Christianity is ever showing itself stronger than its own polemic. The lines of Paul's husbandry are not always mathematical in their straightness, measured at least by the world's wisdom. It was possibly with defective discrimination that Apollos did his part of the watering. He might happen to half drown with his irrigations seeds needing a touch of dryness, or to leave thirsty and unsoftened seeds languishing for the dew and rain. To some severe minds his eloquence might suggest scepticism rather than conviction, for there are phlegmatic men who suspect that all rhetoric is an attempt to trick the understanding. And in the light of present-day criticism, coinciding as it often does with an inferior strength and purity of spiritual life in us, the intellectual limitations under which we present the gospel may become a more conspicuous mark for attack than ever. And yet with all these faulty processes quickening forces are linked. The strongest reason sometimes submits itself to the

gospel where the argumentation is inane. An unknown spell is laid upon natures that are repelled by the human elements in Christian work. Agnosticism itself obeys an inscrutable attraction that will not let it pass into contempt and dogmatic denial. George Eliot near the close of her life said, "Everything is perfect in Christianity, but it just lacks evidence," and she died with the "Imitation of Christ" laid open under her pillow. She is the type of hundreds of cultivated people who neither accept Christianity nor get away from its fascinations. It does not satisfy an over-fastidious reason, and yet there is an underdrift in the life which tends to make all the sentiments and principles profoundly Christian. Is not this drawing towards faith—this looking of intellect and affections in opposite directions, this recoil from an attitude of negation on the one hand, and this reluctance to be committed to a confession of faith on the other, the sign of mysterious magnetisms that are playing around us? The might of an unseen presence is in the air. It is that of Him with whom we are lowly co-workers.

One day Froude observed to Carlyle, after they had been discussing together the problem of a God, that God never seemed to show Himself in the affairs of men. Carlyle, with a look of pain in his face and a tone of solemnity not to be easily forgotten, exclaimed, "The worst of it is God never seems to do anything, Froude." Carlyle possibly expected God to come on the stage of history and play the part of a hugely magnified Cromwell, or Frederick the Great, or Napoleon. He was craving for a portentous demonstration of force that would settle the world's "fools" once for all. Christ had different thoughts and expectations, and was able to see that God is

always and everywhere active. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The social life around us is tremulous with His movement. The man who works for the redemption of mankind from the deepest evil in its life will not long want the sign that God works. The sign is so universal that we have perhaps ceased to call it a sign.

In spite of the daily abuses to which conscience is subjected it is quickened again and again to new strength and testimony. Is not that a demonstration of God's activity? More wonderful than legend of poet or miracle of prophet is the rejuvenation of this fine moral sense when by every known law of life it ought to have become effete. Men are not only compelled by their highest intuitions to turn towards Christianity whilst they reason pertinaciously against its very elements; they defy the mandates of conscience and inflict upon this delicate moral faculty treatment the like of which would incurably vitiate any organ of the body or any function of the brain, and yet this mysterious thing survives reiterated mortal outrage. Mystic streams flow about their pathway in which the defilements taken up by the ethical instinct are sloughed away. We encounter men who are leprous foul in their daily lives, whose every fibre has become a taint; we see them wallow in morbid derangements of feeling, imagination, conduct; and in spite of themselves, ideals arise within them sweet and fair as though fresh-winged from the deep mystery of God's bosom. Not stranger is the sight of white-robed angels gliding at nightfall through Sodom than is the lighting-up of these abandoned natures with visions that are pure, tender, and radiant with unearthly sanctity.

It would be possible to illustrate this by a dozen conspicuous names in literature. Conscience, however much warped, obscured, disobeyed, rarely becomes stone-dead in the present life. A holy and unseen co-worker achieves the miracle. Alongside of every true disciple there is the unseen companionship of help. God is always giving miraculous moral increase.

But whilst this tremendous co-operation of God is always going on in the realm of the spirit, and the highest convictions of Christianity are sometimes wrought without a commensurate logical demonstration, God never casts off His lowly coadjutors. No conversion ever takes place without the human agency in it at some point or other. God seeks not to supersede, but to inspirit us and to bring responsibility to remembrance by these sublime and secret puttings forth of His energy. God makes the worm to thresh the mountain, but he does not often beat the mountain small as the dust of the balance in human affairs without the instrumentality of the worm. What a crime inaction becomes in view of God's perpetual work in the unknown spheres of the human spirit! Such is the high partnership of privilege you dissolve when you look back from the plough to which you have put your hand, or suffer yourself to be paralysed by pique, partisanship, unbelief.

The fact that our work is conjoined with the Divine is *the true root of motive.* It ought ever to be an adequate inspiration to us that the work is God's, and that He has called us into its fellowship. Is not the motive that stirs in His heart and moves His stupendous activities without ceasing, sufficient for

us? What is good enough to engage the majestic energies of God is surely good enough for us. Does the work that beseems His matchless sovereignty need commendation from us, or the high seal of our rank and prestige? Into the work He touches with His sceptred hand on the one side, and which we are permitted to touch with our feeble hands of flesh on the other, He reflects all the glory of His attributes. This thought should humble and at the same time save us from all petty and vainglorious rivalries and partisanships.

The men who had ministered at Corinth, and around whose names factions were forming, *differed in their gifts.* Paul was the wise master-builder who dealt with massive fundamentals. The elaboration of his artistic successors would not have counted for much without Pauline teaching for corner and foundation-stone. Some people would have liked to see more paint, gilding, embellishment on his granite. The task of Apollos was chiefly one of garniture, useful and fitted to attract, but vain without the bulwark of well-tested logic behind and beneath it. If it were a question of weighing one form of genius against another, the philosophical historian would doubtless give the first place to Paul. Of course we should have crowded to hear Apollos, although we might perhaps be a little contemptuous after all of his youthful rhetoric, and miss the intellectual grasp of his plain predecessor; but we are not all philosophical historians. Paul claims no pre-eminence for his own gift, and would discountenance our attempt to claim it for him. We are free to prefer the teachers who best quicken and instruct us, and the preference is only schismatical when it passes into ill-natured

depreciation of other teachers. Gifts are diverse no less than the crowns which shall recompense the faithful use of gifts, but the work is one. All are helped by the same Divine processes that march unseen around us, and all shall find their recompense in the smile that makes the glory beyond the veil. The praise of partisans is the jangle of the bells on the fool's cap, and not the judgment benediction that shall crown us for ever. God's association with us in service is the only spring of valid motive.

Alas for us! we sometimes sink lower than these Corinthian sectaries and schismatics. Certain teachers may attract us by their natural and spiritual gifts, and preferences of this sort are not necessarily mischievous. But what shall we say of the people who *choose their church work and relation upon a basis of social interest and expediency only?* If we deliberately seek our work by the side of the rich, the titled, the prosperous, we do not half believe in the fact of God's co-operation. Newspapers which cater for the godly genteel sometimes tell us that the Queen reads the Bible in the cottages of the poor. Sunday-school work is commended to us because men of great political importance have been engaged in it. Quite a zeal for district visitation springs up when some tinsel goddess of a provincial coterie sets herself to be special providence to a little street in the slums. That is the apotheosis of caddishness. The appeal to motives of such an order abases the saint into a lackey. I always like to hear of godliness in high places, and I am equally glad to hear of religious zeal in dock-labourers or chimney-sweeps, and in their wives and daughters. Let us have minds so braced that they shall go out in profound and stead-

fast sympathy with the Divine Worker, and then we shall not need to be moved by some adventitious attraction in the fellow-worshipper and fellow-servant. Do not let us belittle the Pentecost into a Vanity Fair. The work you do for God and with God has enough dignity about it whoever else may be doing or leaving it undone.

We are sometimes cast down by *a sense of the limitation in our power of achievement.* It is said that the engineer who planned the Brooklyn bridge —one of the most colossal triumphs of scientific skill in the world—was a bed-ridden invalid; and that with the help of a telescope he watched the bridge grow into shape day by day from his couch of paralysis and pain. He triumphed because the great thought in a fragile frame was conjoined with all but exhaustless capital and the illimitable labour capital could bring into the field. If we are God's true servants all the wealth and power of the universe are behind our frail thoughts and aspirations, and we shall do all things through Christ strengthening us. The empyrean is full of thousands upon thousands of ministers; his and ours, for we are joint labourers with one "who maketh His angels winds, His ministers a flame of fire."

The natures upon which we are working often seem characterised by irretrievable barrenness, and we are ready to despond. His exhaustless vitality shall give quickening to the most hopeless work. The growths of nature are a parable of the triumphant and indestructible increase He gives. The frailest life is made indomitably perennial through His unseen husbandries. A fruitful valley may be trampled into barrenness by the march of armies. Trees may

be blasted into charcoal outlines in the sheet of fierce flame that consumes the solid phalanxes of life. A garden of Eden may shrivel into a smoking and hail-swept Sodom. But the rains come back. The patient sun shines day by day. And at last the black boughs swell out into green buds and pink-tipped blossoms again, daisy and harebell spring unharmed in the hoof-prints of the war-horses, wild roses bend tenderly as though hiding the shame of unburied skeletons, and the thick clusters of violets shed their spices to banish the last odours of corruption. Flowers frailer than the smitten armies rise unconquered. In plains battered into desolation the blossom-crowns of nature's victory gleam once more. So is it with God's spiritual husbandries in this black, barren, havoc-smitten realm of humanity. His work is unconquerable, and the infinitely resourceful God is ever giving the increase.

The perilous antagonisms that league themselves against our work sometimes cause our hearts to sink with fear. If it be true that we are labourers together with God, the forces of temptation shall be at last restrained and turned back.

A short time ago I saw a well-kept flower-garden blooming in the little angle of ground formed at the junction of two railway lines. The helpless flowers were thriving there in spite of the terrible forces that came so near them on every side. If you were to put an untaught savage inside the garden hedge and let him hear the screaming engines and see the files of carriages or the trucks laden with coal, timber, and iron converging towards this fairy oasis, he would be ready to say, "These beautiful things will be torn to shreds in a moment." But behind the garden fences

there are the lines of strong, faithful steel keeping each engine and carriage and truck in its appointed place, and though the air vibrates with destructive forces, and pansy, primrose, and geranium live in a world of tremors, not a silken filament is snapped, and not a petal falls untimely to the earth. In the very angle of these forces the frailest life is unharmed. To all these possibilities of destruction the steel puts its bound.

So with the fine spiritual husbandries that foster faith in the souls around us. That faith sometimes seems a thing of hair-spun filaments, a bundle of frailties, a fairy fabric of soft-hued gossamers trembling at every breath. The arrogancies of sacerdotalism menace it. The avalanche of nineteenth century atheism is poised over it. The air hurtles with fiery hostilities. The mechanisms of diabolic temptation encroach on every side upon our work. Public-house, gaming-club, ill-ordered home, threaten disasters of which we do not like to think. The air quivers with anger of demons. Yet the work is God's, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In the very angle of these demoniac forces the work shall thrive, for the hidden lines of His protecting power are round about it. You need not despair, for you do not carry your responsibilities alone. You are a joint labourer with Him to whom belong the shields of the earth.

The fact that we are linked with God in His high and beneficent service is a pledge of our sure and sufficient recompense. Away with our rivalries and partisanships, for they are a token we have begun to think the work ours rather than His ; and when we allow the human to displace the Divine, we may well

be troubled about the reckoning to which the labourer looks. Very little building would go on if the hodman could see no one ahead of him but the mason, and the mason the carpenter, and the carpenter the plumber, and the plumber the painter. The less they think about the other's comparative weight and influence, and the more about the architect and the millionaire behind the architect who employs them all, the better for their personal peace and the quick success of their work. Strife, inward schism, man-worship and service, always tend to make Christ's crowning hand a very shadowy thing to us. In many spheres of human activity workers are strangely slow to recognise their comrades, and only the most conspicuous of these can hope for wide-spread appreciation. God will recognise His weakest coadjutor because His discrimination is all-encircling, and He works with us not only to further the ends for which we are enlisted, but so that according to the great law of grace the work that is most distinctively Divine may be shared in by the meanest and counted up into his recompense.

Think of God's unresting co-operation as a pattern of patient continuance in well-doing. Competent scholars have suggested an instructive alteration of one of the clauses in the chapter before us, "God was giving the increase." We speak of the early and latter rain, of unwonted manifestations of Divine power for which we have to wait, of special outpourings of blessing from above; but such expressions may mislead us. It is our work that is intermittent, not God's. It is His continuous habit to give the increase. The fact that some of our birds should betake themselves to the Arctic circle in the

spring has long been a puzzle to our naturalists, and a recent writer has thrown out the idea that it is because in the early summer there is little or no night there. The parent bird can spend the whole of the twenty-four hours in catering for its young. And we need to do our work in a circle with no setting sun in it. Let there be no eclipse of our working day through faction, no shadow of unbelief resting upon the hours God's providence has allotted to us, no darkening languor which is a sadder night than that of death. Work after His pattern who is always giving the increase, and your life shall not be in vain.

XX.

THE BENEDICTION OF PERFECT WORK.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—HEB. xiii. 20, 21.

THE connection in which these words occur incidentally illustrates the truth of the common priesthood of believers. The unknown interpreter of Jewish ritual to whom a special inspiration from God has come, and who in this magnificent invocation pours forth his desires for the communities of Jewish believers, yet confesses his own dependence upon the prayers of those he is seeking to instruct in the mind of God.

The phraseology of this benediction is determined by the special exposition of truth and duty which immediately precedes it. The few words that present the basis of our perfecting in practical goodness echo the doctrines of expiation and mediatorial sovereignty set forth in the early part of the Epistle, whilst the terse, graphic expressions which indicate the character of that perfecting sum up for us the duties that are the fruit of those doctrines—duties enforced by illus-

trious example and fervent exhortation in the closing chapters of the Epistle. Under the New Covenant, of which the blood of Christ's sacrifice is the seal, and Jesus Christ, the ascended Shepherd King, the living Minister, a perfection is possible to us, for which Enoch and Abraham, Moses and David had to wait. "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than these."

I. Consider *the character of that Christian completeness* asked for these Hebrew believers in the prayer before us: "Perfect in every good work to do His will."

This perfection is not that faultless adjustment of state and outward condition which the author of the Epistle has in view when he speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect." The perfection of our nature on many of its sides may be hopelessly precluded by the inhospitable character of our surroundings. There are defects which belong to our constrained circumstances, and must never be allowed insidiously to discredit the power of Divine grace in man. Whilst prepared to vindicate the sober possibilities implied in this benediction we allow that there is a tender and subtle bloom that can only come to human nature when the light of heaven breaks upon it, and the brightest suns of the firmament are eclipsed.

The perfection here asked is *perfection on the side of our moral activities*—such perfection as the grace of God can create and sustain within us, in spite of the drawbacks inherent in ourselves and our ungenial earthly surroundings. It is the realisation of the best to which the material of our common nature will permit us to rise. We do not expect the same perfection of detail in a fresco as in a cabinet painting, in

plaster moulding as in a marble frieze. And yet we may sometimes have the display of transcendent skill in the inferior material. Perfect water-lilies thrive in England, although we do not happen to possess those conditions of sun and temperature which in the Tropics have developed a Victoria Regia measuring twenty or thirty feet across the cup of the flower. On a more modest scale we have what is strangely fair. We do not expect the grand flight of the eagle from the flocks of cranes that waver in their course through the air, as though they were rising and falling with the languid swing of atmospheric waves, or from wood-pigeons that dart timidly from tree to tree. From sparrow or linnet or yellow-hammer we do not expect the note of lark or thrush or nightingale. A voice may be perfect within the limits of a parlour that will fail when tested by the large spaces of a concert-hall. All earthly perfection has its inevitable limits, limits determined by the nature or the surroundings. Save in the Absolute and the Eternal Himself there is no final and unlimited perfection. "None is good save One, that is God." But there is a relative perfection attainable by the fallen and the finite, for which this writer prays—a perfection that is the highest fruit of God's power abiding in human souls. In the struggling persistent fulfilment of the Divine will maintained through a round of petty duties in shop or office or household there may be as much perfection of its kind as in the circles of majestic service through which the pinions of Gabriel sweep. Both types of service are mean and meagre in comparison with God's perfection, but the term of utmost capability may have been reached and God for the time being satisfied.

It is obvious at a glance that this perfection is *inwrought and not imputed.* When the word of God portrays the Christian life in its loftiest aspects of privilege and obligation, and insists upon complete inward and outward purity, timid souls that we are, we too often evade the force of the appeal by entrenching ourselves in texts that have a savour of imputation about them. Some of us half think that just as the coloured fires burnt at a carnival seem to tint with momentary health many a cadaverous face, and touch with royal splendour many a threadbare garment, so Christ's moral beauty projects itself over the believer's life of seam and blemish, and paints up its pale anæmic decrepitudes without effecting a deep and abiding inward change. Now Christians do not become "perfect in every good thing" through the conveyance or transmission of the separate acts of Christ's personal righteousness. Whilst the death of the holy Saviour is the ground alike of our forgiveness and sanctification, the language of the New Testament nowhere justifies us in regarding His perfect works as put in place of the perfect works required from us in the maturity of our Christian life. Our perfecting is not a process of imputation. Some theories of sanctification suggest those Oriental processions for which every beggar in the city has been enlisted, all rags of course being disguised by long, crimson, gold-embroidered cloaks. But the hired cloak does not make the wearer one whit the less a lazy, ragged, unwholesome scamp, indisposed for the work by which he might be decently clothed. Christ Himself must be formed in us. Not because He clothes our shame with His resplendent purity, but because He plants in the soul truly united to Himself

the same root principles of moral fruitfulness, is Christ our sanctification. It is by a process of inspiration rather than investiture that He fulfils the relationship, blending His mystic vitality with our inmost motives and sympathies.

In Persia ornamental feltings are made by cutting camel's hair into short lengths and rolling it upon a hard floor after it has been moistened with some adhesive composition. Before it has quite hardened a coloured pattern in wool is placed upon the half-finished felt and incorporated with it by successive rollings. A pattern so introduced is more or less superficial. By a much deeper process than that must the pattern of Christ be wrought into us. It is no mere device that is attached to the outside tegument of our lives and wrought into its shallower textures by a round of ritual or discipline. The spirit of His goodness must be interwoven by an unseen hand with the very beginnings of our motive and the deepest fibres of our desire, as well as with every phase of our practical conduct. The perfection prayed for in the text must be secretly wrought into our hidden life and become active and visible excellence through the force of holy and irrepressible realities at the very roots of our being. This perfection is not a reconstruction of acts achieved eighteen centuries ago, of which we are the happy heirs, it is not a gleam from the old historic life of the perfect Master flashed upon us, just as the sunbeam signal is flashed upon the mirror of the heliograph ; but it is the happy experience which is attained when the perfect Master comes to live day by day within His willing servants, asserting a high authority over every taste and faculty, and so permeating their lives with

the glory of His sovereign presence that He at last becomes supreme in all things, and to deny the holiness of the daily service is to dishonour the indwelling Master. "Perfect in every good work to do His will."

This perfection, like all God's gifts, is *full-orbed*, and not one-sided. "In every good thing." Some men get a knack of practising the few particular excellencies to which their natural temperaments may incline them to the neglect of others, just as we divide our labour and portion out to separate students and investigators the different fields of knowledge, and half expect these men to be nonentities outside their own particular grooves. There are too many specialists in the sphere of Christian virtue and service, and they are a product of artificial conditions. God's gift makes characters which are many and not one-sided, and those whom He fully sanctifies cannot be described as men who have the defects of their qualities.

The wide field to be traversed in science compels men to be specialists. One man does not know much about grasses, but he has an exhaustive and well-classified collection of flowering plants. Another has given no study to moths, but he can recognise every bird that nests in the British Isles, or that comes as a brief visitor only. Another can scarcely distinguish crystalline and stratified rocks from each other, but he could tell to fifty years at what time the different parts of a cathedral were built. That kind of subdivision is necessary in the realm of science, but it becomes an insufferable impertinence when it shows itself in morals or religion.

An acquaintance takes us to the cabinet of his

virtues, and by a code of more or less modest hints makes us to understand that he does not claim to be very reverent or spiritual or godly, but he does aim at a life of consistent practical kindliness. He has never turned his back on an old friend, and at great pain and sacrifice has more than once saved some fellow-citizen from beggary. Another delicately insinuates that he is not an enthusiast about church or prayer meeting, but his unimpeachable business integrity is something that many a high-flying saint might envy. A third intimates that he does not dash into the philanthropies that are the craze of the moment or coquette with the new social reforms that may be projected, but he is a model at home. Another poses as a leader of Church movements and talks much of the many missions in which he is engaged, but he is perhaps scarcely awake to the fact that there are grave drawbacks in his record at which his fellows stare. He has risked other people's money in ways he would have been too canny to take if he had been trading with his own, and in the home circle he is often acrid, despotic, implacable. And then there are men in whose characters there is a finer balance, well spoken of in business, beloved in the family, strenuous and disinterested in Christian activity, but who lack that bond of perfectness which is declared to be love. Some men are strong in the qualities inherited from their ancestors, strong in the peculiar virtues favoured in the nation to which they belong, but defective where their ancestry has been defective, or where the national tradition that stimulates them is one-sided. Our perfection must be full-orbed. God's requirement is satisfied when we realise all the excellence we see and approve, and not before.

Paradox as it must seem to a worldly mind, it is easier for a man to attain a many-sided perfection than to be an ill-proportioned specialist only. One grace helps another in the complete life. A wise love often finds it easier to rule a large than a small household. So where all the graces are present they nourish and succour and animate each other. Elements of interest and variety arise in the full-orbed perfection that freshen and encourage the heart. The undivided whole of Christian duty is much easier than the part. Indeed I am not sure that we can count upon the grace of God at all to help us if we make any half-measure of sanctification a standard and an ideal.

This perfection is subject to *an infallible standard of appeal.* "Perfect to do His will." The Divine life within us reaches its highest consummation when we become entirely responsive to the purposes of God as He makes them known to us. We touch the high-water mark of our spiritual capabilities when our thought, speech, decision, and practical conduct run in the exact line of God's wishes. Perhaps the opening word of the benediction carries some interpreting significance into the phrase, "His will." "The God of peace;" that describes a character, and from the character you can predicate the quality of the will. That will sets itself to attune all minds to the Divine mind, and in that to each other. It is for this subtle and far-reaching harmony we all wait, and God's will is the keynote out of which it rises.

The one consistent, complete, and unbroken fulfilment of this will is to be found in the well-beloved Son with whom the Father was always well pleased. What an exquisite filial acceptance of that will in those long years of patient, lowly toil amidst the quiet

hills of Nazareth! We see no sign of hurry, distraction, no contemptuous neglect of little things in the midst of the vast thoughts and emotions that must have been stirred by the coming drama of redemption. What a splendid fulfilment of that peace-creating, all-reconciling will in the active merciful ministries of His public life as "He went about doing good," "for God was with Him." His overpowering severities when face to face with pretentious sin were not the least important part of His contribution to the universal harmony He had come to set up. In the tenderness with which He met suppliant and disciple, how matchless His fulfilment of the Divine mission of peace-maker! What unrivalled loyalty to the will of the Father in His obedience unto death, when each sensibility shrank and each fibre quivered! "Not as I will." "I come to do Thy will." That is the pattern fulfilment, and if inward light upon God's will should by any chance seem to fail we can always discover that will anew in Christ. All perfection must be measured by its relation to this standard. "Perfect to do His will."

II. Let us glance at *the links in the chain of agencies* set to achieve the end for which the writer prays.

The invocation of God as "the God of peace" suggests a relation between the gift of peace and the power that perfects believers in all spiritual excellence.

This title encourages faith by reminding us that if perfect peace is the crown of a perfect, loving obedience to the will of God, God stands pledged to be the helper of our perfecting. He sent Jesus Christ to be the minister of the peace and blessedness possessing His own infinite nature. That was the motive alike of the mission to earth, of the great

sacrifice of the Cross, and of the exaltation of the risen Saviour to the right hand of God. The precious blood of the Son was the price God thought fit to pay to make peace possible between Himself and mankind. If this be one of the primal motives of the dispensation of grace, and God is "the God of peace," in our lofty struggles after spiritual completeness we may boldly look for the co-operation of His energies. To bring us into entire accord with God and His elect universe is the grand end of those dispensations ruled by Jesus Christ. By making us fit for every good word and work God is only carrying to its end the purpose of peace set forth in the Cross. Reconciliation to God is sometimes miserably partial. We are not reconciled to the entire sum of our duty, for we are lethargic, selfish, unprogressive, disposed to minimise rather than enlarge the scope of our obligation and service. There must always be more or less of secret dissatisfaction where such a condition prevails, for the threat directed against those who temporise upon questions of duty is surely fulfilling itself: "I will fight against thee with the sword of My mouth." It is not quite an unknown thing for a believer's experience to be like weather forecasts in the morning papers, sunshine on one side of the island, and steady rain on another, gentle winds in the south, and deadly gales in the north. Obedience in great principles and waywardness in what we are pleased to think non-essentials, peace and reproach, sunshine and cloud mix themselves up strangely in the same little life, and sometimes on the very same day of the life. We must get beyond that. God can only completely harmonise us with Himself and make us taste His supreme gift of peace by harmonising us

with every form of duty. This is the crowning touch of our reconciliation, and without it our sacrifice of peace is bound to the Cross in vain. "The God of peace make you perfect."

The author of our perfecting *is identified with a great historic fact*—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Why this unexpected reference to the resurrection? We do not often think of these subjects in this particular connection. What relation had the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the sanctification of these Hebrew believers?

The resurrection was *a supreme exhibition of power*, and the power that had triumphed once could triumph again.

The overshadowing hand that kept the human form of our Lord unspotted amidst the corruptions of the sepulchre, can surely keep us without taint of decay or spiritual death in the midst of a world lying in the wicked one. That same forth-putting of energy that brought back to the crucified flesh of the Son the thrill of infinite movement, and the flush of immortal beauty, and the halo of incomparable honour, can restore us to the faultless image in which we were made, reinvest us with the lost attributes of our primal sovereignty, and crown these beings restored to faultless righteousness with a God-like majesty. This is not the first time in the New Testament that Christ's resurrection is described as the embodiment of a power that will perfect the believer in all holiness of life and endow with an unknown wealth of spiritual excellence and resource. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul tells us that "the exceeding greatness of God's power towards them that believe" is to be gauged by

nothing less than "the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand." A most gigantic sweep of power that! The strength of the Eternal lifted the Lord Jesus from the shadow and shame and curse of death, raised Him above the successive ranks of earth and the ever ascending hierarchies of heaven, and enthroned Him for ever on the highest pinnacle of majesty in the universe. And for all spiritual ends the selfsame power works in us even now, and the same Father of glory waits for us to accept the help and perfecting His own right hand can bring. Do not think too much of your own weakness unless to drive your self-confident nature to the strength stretched out towards the world in this significant act. Do not let hope die down within you as you see the wreck of bygone aspirations floating away on the retreating years into horizons of darkness. Your sense of the power that perfects must be determined not by what you have seen in yourself, but by what you see in Jesus Christ. At the very birth of the dispensation under which we live the Father sets forth the glory of His power in the quickening of His Son as a pattern to encourage the faith of those who ask to be made complete with every redemptive gift.

But between Christ's resurrection and our perfecting in every good thing there are yet profounder and more beautiful analogies. The fact that Christ was loosed from the bonds of death and exalted to pre-eminent power and splendour is a proof that *the Divine hand has perfecting skill in its touch*, and the hand that was on Jesus Christ then to achieve all that, is on us to-day. The malice and antagonism of

the world can never set a term to the work of God in Christ or His followers. Not a little of the noblest work of this world falls short of completion. There are men who design grandly, but lack the skill and endurance necessary to put in last lines worthy of the first. Some unpolished surface in their work offends the eye, some flaw of the process that has not been smoothed away, some persistent difficulty that has provoked and wearied into carelessness. But in the end God's work can never fall below the level of the first idea. The reconciliation of which the death was the very basis and key-stone was crowned amidst shoutings when the Son made His exodus from the tomb. The work did not come to an abrupt and unhonoured end. As the centurion and his holy victim passed out of the city Pharisee and priest may have exchanged congratulations upon the great collapse. The powers of darkness may have been drunk with mad elation over their plantom victory. But when the resurrection came, that was the pledge that all Christ's aims should be carried on with mightier power than before and triumphantly consummated. And He who crowned with all the glory of His sublime energy the work of reconciliation in so far as it could be carried on outside us, shall crown with the same transcendent manifestations that portion of the work which lies within us. The work of the Son by the Spirit shall be no less well-pleasing to the Father and no less successful in its issues than the work of the Son by the Cross. If you saw a sculptor at his work, and found that he had brought every feature of the face to faultless balance and life-like grace, you would be quite sure that his skill would be equal to the task of shaping the last vein in

the hand and the last sinew in the foot. God is just as ready to perfect the work in us as in our Redeeming Head, for we are members of His body. In spite of our present defects we are to be parts of the same sublime masterpiece, and the same Divine touch will add whatever is needful to complete the whole.

But the resurrection of Jesus Christ seems to suggest yet more vital relations with our perfecting in every good thing, inasmuch as it gives to us *a living ministry of sanctifying power*. This ministry is explicitly indicated in the title here applied to Jesus Christ—"the great Shepherd of the sheep." The term always describes Christ in His blessed and helpful relation of fellowship with His redeemed flock. In this designation we almost catch an echo of our Lord's parting words to the disciples when on the way to Gethsemane. "I smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." "But after I am risen again I go before you into Galilee." That journey of the risen Shepherd at the head of His once scattered but now revived and regathered people, knit by His presence into a brotherhood stronger than empires, was a fit symbol of His subsequent influence and attitude and work. We see Him typically gathering together His faint and halting and disheartened people, and by gentle steps leading them on into that plenitude of Pentecostal power and perfect work emanating from His resurrection life. That was the first step of an age-long pilgrimage. The Shepherd is restored to His flock to carry on yet more effectually the work which violence had seemed for a moment to defeat. We no longer look with irrepressible pathos and breathless terror on the pale form of a slain Shepherd, whilst

sections of His despoiled and bleating flock wander hither and thither, untended, unfed, unshielded from the threatening death. He is restored to His flock in new majesty and power, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and new hope and strength and courage come back to the affrighted members of it. The perfect Christ is raised up to repeat His perfect life in His followers, to live out again in His countless members the spirit of beneficence once illustrated in the same flesh and blood. The resurrection is a sacramental assurance of the endlessness of Christ's life within His disciples; it establishes a living ministry of sanctifying power, and assures men God is pledged to bring their stunted, sterile lives to the measure of Christ's untold fulness.

The reference to the blood of the Covenant the Revisers connect with the designation of the risen Lord to the oversight of His elect people, and not immediately with the clause about the believer's perfecting. The change perhaps makes the meaning more suggestive. The blood that attested this endless Covenant was the ethical ground of our Lord's resurrection and sovereign guardianship over His people. His enthronement was not a tribute to the glory of His pre-incarnate being only. It was to honour a Covenant of unexampled sacredness, to authenticate its trustworthiness, and to establish an august ministry for the due execution of its terms, that the Father lifted the humanity of the Son out of the sepulchre and received it into heaven, and made it a spring of purifying virtue in the universal life of man. This stupendous display of power was a first-fruit of the Covenant.

And the Covenant which was effectual after this

miraculous fashion shall surely bespeak and demand and obtain for us all the moral power necessary to conform to the high purpose of God, since it has already brought all needful gift and authority and qualification to its chief minister. We are sanctified by that blood of the Covenant which has been honoured in this unique way, and ought to trust assurances whose validity and faithfulness have been vindicated by this august demonstration of power. If God were to refuse His perfecting grace to a single soul zealously seeking it, the Covenant to which Christ owes His estate in heaven would be broken, denounced, riven to its lowest foundations. Whilst the resurrection proclaims God's power, the Covenant to which it was vitally related, and of which it was a fruit and vindication, proclaims the faithfulness of Him who hallows His people to His own spotless service by the hand of His Son. The risen and exalted Christ is a witness to the inviolability of that Covenant which only receives its full accomplishment in our perfecting. There is no weakness, no moral incapacity, no disqualification for service in any of us to the removal of which the Covenant does not pledge itself and the power of Him who reigns as an eternal mediator through its enduring sanctions.

III. Our text asserts *the inwardness of the processes* by which our practical perfecting is achieved. "Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." Our sanctification can never be completed by a series of facts that lie outside the sphere of our own personality, however great and impressive those facts may be. The law of perfection must be wrought by the Spirit of God into our secret and hidden sensibilities.

The history of our planet has two sides—a working in and a working out. "We have just succeeded in painting a patch or two of green on the barren mountain side," was the description given by an Irish peasant of the meagre result attained in one locality by the tillage of the ground. God's work begins far deeper than that, and is no mere surface decoration. Primeval fires once rent the crust of the earth, and burnt beneath the roots of the mountains. Gems and glittering metals were formed by their alchemy. Floods tore down the forests and submerged the proudest trees. Coal-fields built themselves out of the successive layers of ruin. Glaciers ploughed out the valleys and quiet nooks for corn-fields and vineyards were made ready. That was the history of the working in. Farmsteads smile with their fruit and grain. Busy spindles that clothe the world whirl in their ceaseless economies of beneficence. Labyrinths of wire creep under oceans, and fly over mountains, and bind together the scattered fragments of our race into a vast palpitating whole. Modern civilisation, with its wealth of gold and its strength of steel, sits enthroned in marble palaces. That is the history of the working out.

Our souls melt like wax in the flames through which we have to pass. God sends the ice-plough of unwelcome providences, and breaks up again and again the surface of our lives. Harrowing disciplines come into play, and wear the hard edge from our pride. Sweet tender rains fall upon us in softening miracle. The image of the perfect Christ broods over us in its absolute loveliness. The stagnation of our chaos is quickened, and our affections come to hold a mystic life within them. That is God's working in. We

can do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us. Passion is conquered in all its forms, self denied, ambition laid aside, pride unmurmuringly mortified. We account it a higher joy to suffer Christ's will than to triumphantly effect our own. Christ comes to live within us in all meekness and submission and gentleness, uniting us to God in heaven and men on earth. That is the working out.

The forces of God's indwelling grace can always make a man rise above the promise of his natural environment. In computing the possibilities of the Christian life we must bring into our reckoning the untold power of the Divine Spirit in men as well as the inhospitable conditions under which we live, and the intractabilities of the nature we bear.

A recent traveller in Japan expresses his surprise at finding that a country with Arctic winters should produce a subtropical flora. In a winter's journey, when the landscape was white with snow, and keen biting winds were careering madly across the plains, he was astonished to see palms and bamboos and orange trees flourishing on every side. He thought the volcanic character of the country must explain the anomaly. The heat set free by volcanic movements lingered in the soil, not very far beneath the surface, and the roots of the vegetation stretched down to the tracts in which volcanic heat was stored. And when God puts the fire of His love into the deep, secret places of our nature, will it not be thus with us? Arctic winters may beat upon us. The world may chill us with the breath of its pride, reproach, indifference, unbelief. But in spite of this there will still spring up within us the palm and the

myrtle tree, and all the rare growths of the King's own garden. By shedding His love abroad within our hearts God works within us the power of perpetual fruitfulness.

Remember God never works within us what we are striving to work out in our own strength, for that would be to aid and abet our spiritual pride. If we are to possess the grace which shall make our every work acceptable in His sight our entire trust must be yielded up to Him.

Remember also, God never works within us what we are not striving to work out at all. What God works within any of His servants is just the gauge of what they are ready to work out in their lives. In the distribution of His grace God leaves no margin of unprofitable investment. When we are willing to work out more perfect things in our lives He will be ready to work out more perfect things within us. Oh that the word may be realised in us, "His people shall be willing in the day of His power"!

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